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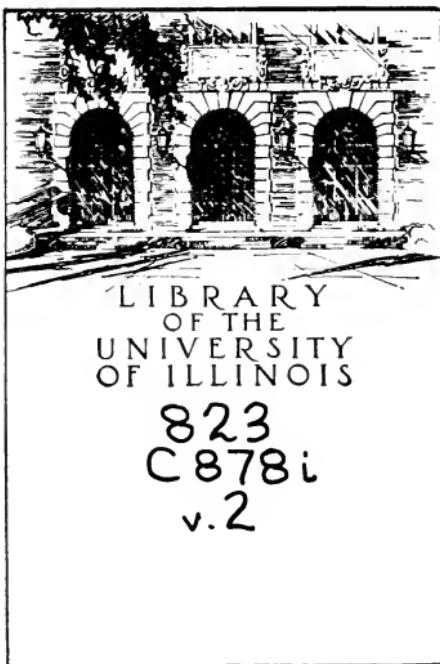
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INTERFERENCE.

INTERFERENCE.

A Novel.

BY

B. M. CROKER,

AUTHOR OF

“PROPER PRIDE,” “PRETTY MISS NEVILLE,”
“A BIRD OF PASSAGE,” “DIANA BARRINGTON,”
“TWO MASTERS,” &c.

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INTERFERENCE.

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CHAPTER I.

“INTERRUPTED.”

“It is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love.”

—MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

BETTY had been unremitting in her attention to Miss Dopping all through the winter, and her virtue was not to be her sole reward ! The old lady hired a pair of posters, and drove out to Noone in her mother's green chariot, and had a long private interview with Mrs. Redmond. She was going to the Moores of Roskeen for a week, and they had asked her to bring Betty.—It would be by no means Betty's first visit to that

part of the world. She and Kathleen Moore were bosom friends ; indeed she was a great favourite with the whole family. But this visit would be a more solemn occasion ; as Miss Dopping represented to Mrs. Redmond, her young friend was now eighteen, it was manifestly high time she came out ; she might make her *début* at Lord Enniscorthy's ball. She might go with the Moores, and Miss Dopping herself would chaperone her, and provide her dress ! Mrs. Redmond hesitated. Ought not Betty to come out under *her* wing ?

“Not at all, my good creature,” replied the other promptly. “You have your own chick to look after” (“and a pretty old chick too,” she remarked inwardly). “I’ve known Betty long before you ever heard of her existence. She is my child. I owe her many a

pleasant hour, and she shall owe some pleasant hours to me.”

Miss Dopping was fully determined to carry her point, and when she took her leave, Mrs. Redmond had given her a promise to “see about it,” and let her know before post time next day.

Now promising to “see about it,” really meant consulting Belle. What would she say to Betty’s coming out? Strange to say Belle bore the news surprisingly well! It was true that she was a little jealous of her cousin appearing with *éclat* in the suite of the Moores, for the Moores were great social magnates, and took but scant notice of Belle and her mother. (They were strangers in a county where it takes ten years at least to ingratiate yourself with the old residents.)

It was a triumphant fact that Lady

Mary Moore had left cards at Noone, thanks to Miss Dopping's good offices, but a slight lowering of the eyelids was the only salutation she ever vouchsafed to Bel and the Dragon.

She had seen the former at a fancy ball, clothed in smiles and a little tulle, and had taken a prejudice against her on the spot—the prejudice of a prudent mother with two marriageable sons.

“Of course Betty must come out some time or other,” thought Belle as she carefully considered the situation ; and Miss Dopping and Maria Finny had been making disagreeable speeches about her costumes, and her occupations. For instance, Maria had said in her most aggressive manner : “I suppose your mother is making a fine purse for Betty ! We all know she has two hundred a year of her own, and her dress and

board cannot cost thirty ; indeed she is as good as two servants—and saves that much."

"What a kind interest you take in our concerns !" returned Belle, with blazing eyes, and a quiver in her voice.

"I do," replied Maria with fearless frankness, "and it's your interest to know that every one in the place is talking of the shabby way that Betty is dressed ; they say she wears your cast-off dresses, but I cannot believe *that*, for I've seen you in things that I daren't offer to a beggar woman."

Belle had made a mental note of this conversation. It would never do to have people gossiping, or to be supposed to ill-use Betty, who was a popular favourite—that would be very bad policy ; unpleasant hints might come to George's ears, and it was essential that he should

only hear complimentary remarks about Noone. Betty, if she went to Roskeen, would be staying in his neighbourhood ; possibly he would be at Roskeen itself ! She would be able to report on his doings, and tell her if he was flirting with anyone ! Unsophisticated Betty should be her spy in the land. Moreover the ball would be no expense. Miss Dopping had guaranteed that ; her cousin could never be her rival, no matter how she was dressed. And after revolving all these matters in her mind, she came to the gracious conclusion that “Betty might go.”

Happy Betty ! who had never suspected that her fate was trembling in the balance, was all gay chatter and high spirits, as she and her adviser laid their heads together, to choose a gown from patterns, and Belle (who could be most

generous and unselfish at other people's expense) selected a most *recherché* and elegant white ball dress, not forgetting such important details as shoes, and fan, and gloves. She even offered to endow her beaming relative with some of her own less becoming belongings.

“There's my grey dress would fit you, with very little alteration, and you can have my red bonnet if you like.”

“No, no,” returned Betty hastily, “I shall do very well ; you know the Moores don't dress much, and I have my new serge, and my black lace for the evenings, and you can re-trim my brown hat.”

These two respectable frocks were the immediate result of Maria Finny's warning ; her conversation (considerably watered down) had been repeated to Mrs. Redmond, with this insignificant issue.

“They do dress,” repeated Belle, “and

there is that little American heiress there. She is certain to be a swell. I wonder if she will set her cap at George Hollroyd ; or Kathleen Moore may take his fancy ! Mind you write and let me know if he makes love to any of the girls over there. Now *promise* me this, Betty ! ” she urged impressively.

“ But I am only going for a week,” objected Betty, “ and you will see him at the ball yourself.”

“ Well, at any rate promise to write and tell me all the news.”

“ I don’t suppose there will be much news, but of course I shall write you if you wish, though I hate writing letters.”

A few days later, Betty was driving down Ballingoole, seated beside Miss Dopping in the old green chariot ; they were on their way to Roskeen, a distance of fifteen miles.

Roskeen was a fine country place, kept up in suitable style, thanks to Lady Mary's comfortable fortune in the Three per Cents ; the shooting was well preserved, the stables were full, the house luxuriously furnished in a modern fashion. Soft Persian carpets covered the floors, velvet portières draped the doors, the walls were lined with fine paintings, there was a music-room, a billiard-room, a winter garden, and a French cook ! and there was never an instant's hesitation in people's minds about accepting an invitation to Roskeen. Betty faithfully fulfilled her promise. A few days after her departure, her anxious cousin received the following letter :—

“ MY DEAR BELLE,—We arrived on Monday in time for dinner, and are the only people staying here, besides Sir

James and Lady Lucas, Mr. Holroyd and Miss Pink, the American girl ; she is engaged to a cousin at home, and is going to be married when she has enough of travelling and seeing the world. She has been all round the globe once with her brother, and says she had a perfectly splendid time, and she feels as if she would like to go again. She is slight, plain, and dark, and plays and sings beautifully and talks a great deal ; her tongue and fingers are always busy and she has the energy of half-a-dozen. I like her, so does everyone. We are very busy getting up *tableaux vivants*. Fred is at home on leave, and more conceited than ever. Miss Pink has taken him in hand. She told him to his face that she called him *very* ugly, and that one of his eyes was certainly larger than the other ! Ghosty is almost quite well, but

still wears his arm in a sling. I think Kathleen is much admired by Mr. Blake of Blakestown, at any rate he comes here nearly every day on some transparent excuse. We have had a good deal of rain, but we do not mind, for we play games, and have music, and billiards, and go for long walks when it clears, and in the evenings we dance. The ball is, as you know, on Tuesday. I am looking forward to it with great pleasure. My dress fits like a glove. I have tried it on, and it looks lovely. Flora Pink says that it is as well made as her Paris frocks, and she never saw anything so *cunning* as the cut of the sleeves ! Miss Dopping is enjoying herself just as much as I am—in her own way. She and Granny Moore discuss old times for hours together. It seems so queer to hear them calling each other Sally and Polly.

Katie is screaming for me to come and play hide-and-go-seek, so good-bye for the present.

“Your affectionate cousin,

“ELIZABETH REDMOND.”

“Dancing and games, and hide-and-go-seek!” muttered Belle. “There is nothing like a few days in a country house for bringing people together, and promoting intimacy. Three days, above all three *wet* days, are better than a hundred balls. However there is luckily no one for George Holroyd to fall in love with. Katie is as good as engaged, the heiress is disposed of—and there is no one else!”

Strange as it may appear, she never cast a thought to Betty. Her remark about wet days in a country house was perfectly just. In those wet days, Betty

was the life of Roskeen. She had known the Moores for years ; they all—even Ghosty and Fred—called her by her Christian name ; she was invariably gay, obliging, and good-tempered, ready for anything, from a game of fox and geese, to a drive on the box seat of Colonel Moore’s drag. George Holroyd saw her now in a new light ! A favoured guest, among luxurious surroundings, bright and pretty, and admired (*too* much admired to please him, for Ghosty followed her about like her shadow), Katie appealed to her opinion on every occasion, Lady Mary stroked her hair affectionately, and Flora Pink was loud in her praises, and said that she “just adored her.”

“I do like you,” said Flora, with a childlike frankness as they sat over the fire in Betty’s room ; “and shall I tell you something—some one likes you *better*

than *I* do, and that's Mr. Holroyd. You see I know all the signs and tokens, for I have gotten a lover of my own."

"Nonsense, Flora, how can you be so silly!"

"Yes, I noticed how he looked at you, when you were dressed up in that splendid old brocade, with your hair powdered, the night of the tableaux, do you mind? And he is so jealous when you are talking to Ghosty; he is a perfectly lovely young man—Great Scott! Betty! you needn't look so angry. Have some candy."

* * * *

The evening of the dance came at last, and as George Holroyd leisurely descended the stairs, previous to taking his seat in the Moores' comfortable family omnibus, he noticed a charming figure flitting down before him—a girl in her

ball dress ! She paused to take one last fond look in the great glass on the first landing. It was Betty, beautified—a fashionable young lady, in a misty, white gown, a pearl necklace, and long gloves. She carried a bouquet, too ; now *who* had given her this bouquet ? He approached softly on the Turkey carpet, and looking over her shoulder observed :

“ *Most* satisfactory, is it not ? ”

“ Oh ! ” blushing and turning round, “ how you startled me, and I am quite nervous enough as it is.”

“ Really you must find that an entirely new sensation ! Pray allow me to feel your pulse ? ”

“ No, no, thank you,” with a smile, “ I am not quite so bad as that, but I have never been to any kind of dance—except the school breaking-up dances, and I have not an idea of what a ball will be

like ! ” and she looked at him with bright, excited eyes.

“ Shall I tell you ? ” he said, as they reached the great carpeted hall, with its two generous fireplaces, and seated themselves on a large Eastern divan. “ A native syce, who had the good luck to obtain a peep of his master in a ball-room, was overheard describing his performances, something in this way—to a brother syce :

“ ‘ First he gallops her about, then he walks her slowly round to cool her, then he gives her water, then he gives her gram’—(that is to say, refreshments)—‘ then he goes and gallops some one else.’ ”

“ I don’t think many people will gallop *me*,” said Betty, laughing, “ I know so few ! But, at any rate, I shall not do like a friend of Miss Pink’s. She goes

and stays in the ladies' dressing-room, when she is not engaged—lest people should see her sitting out!"

"There is no fear that you will be driven to such a desperate expedient," returned George with twinkling eyes. "I hope you are going to give me the first waltz."

"No, I promised it to Fred a week ago. You *know* I did."

"The first dance, then," he urged, "even if it is a square. I am not proud."

She shook her head emphatically as she replied, "Ghosty bespoke that a year ago."

"Hang Ghosty! I am sorry I did not leave him at the bottom of that ditch! At any rate you will give me two waltzes, and the supper dance to begin with?"

“Yes, to begin with and end with. Miss Dopping says that in *her* day it was not correct to dance with any one more than twice.”

“Minuets I presume ! and as they took up best part of an hour, I am with her there. Here comes Fred, chortling to himself as he walks. Look at his beautiful shoes, and the gold buttons on his waistcoat.”

“Hullo,” he exclaimed, “down first ; Betty, you are an early bird—we will not say anything about the worm,” glancing at George. “What a ripping bouquet ! Now I know what old Ghosty was fuming and fussing about, he got it over from Covent Garden.”

“From Covent Garden,” echoed the young lady, “when there are lovely flowers in the hothouses here.”

“Yes, but it’s more swagger to get

’em from town. Remember the first waltz is ours—we will show them how it *ought* to be done.”

“Speak for yourself! I know I dance abominably. I only hope that I shall not make too humbling an exhibition of myself.”

“At least you don’t waltz as if you were going to sit down, nor cling to a fellow as if you were drowning,” said Fred consolingly. “Here they come at last. Miss Pink, you are the pink of perfection. I guess you are going to give me 2, and 5 and 9.”

“No, I expect you will have to guess again,” said Miss Pink drily.

“Of course I know you are engaged. The knowledge has aged me by years.”

“I wonder you ain’t ashamed, Mr. Fred! I truly do. Your jokes throw a

gloom over the whole place—why should you try to damp our little pleasure?"

By this time the hall was full—Lady Mary, in a blaze of family diamonds, Colonel Moore in a sad, dejected state of mind, Miss Dopping in black velvet, with magnificent Mechlin lace — who would suppose this somewhat stately old lady to be the self-same Sally, who wore a poke bonnet, short woollen skirts, and was followed in her walks by a train of hungry beggars, instead of these yards of the finest Genoa pile? The party from Roskeen drove over to Lord Enniscorthy's seat, the scene of the festivity, in a comfortable, well-warmed private omnibus. Flora Pink, Kathleen, and Fred, kept the ball of conversation rolling, but Betty was too nervous, and too full of delightful anticipations to talk much. How her heart beat, as they drove under the grand

entrance porch, and stepped out upon red cloth ! Ghosty Moore gave her his sound arm, and a programme ; in another moment she was among the crowd of strange faces—and presented to Lady Enniscorthy, a stout elderly woman, with a large nose, who smiled on her graciously, and then they passed on into the ball-room. She danced the first lancers with Ghosty, and this gave her time to compose herself, look about her, and regain her self-possession. Several pairs of eyes were fixed on her, and people asked : “Who was the pretty, tall girl who had come with the Moores ?” To hear that “she was nobody in particular, only Mrs. Redmond’s niece,” was rather a disappointment. After the dance, Betty and her partner walked about and recognised their acquaintances —the Malones for instance, who seized

on Betty as upon a long lost friend—Mrs. Malone looking flushed and nervous, in a new black brocade, the Major pompous and talkative, Denis in gloves much too large, and shoes much too small, holding his nose high in the air, and affecting to look down upon the whole thing.

Then there were the Finnys, in a retired nook, which commanded a good view—Mrs. Finny pitifully abject, Maria grim and defiant, hardly knowing a soul in the room, save by sight.

Here the sensible reader will naturally ask, “Why did they come?” They came to protest their gentility; their right to be classed among the “county” gentry, and more particularly, Mrs. Finny came, because Maria made her—and Maria came, because the scene gave her food for discourse for the next twelve

months. She enjoyed the delights of sitting in Jane Bolland's back parlour, and vivisecting the present gay and unsuspecting company. The Major was in his element, and in considerable request among luckless elderly spinsters, whom he made happy by his attentions—by giving them one dance, so that they could say, "Oh, dear me, yes, it was a capital floor, I danced of course." He took starving dowagers into the refreshment room, and quite a convoy of old ladies (of position) down to supper ; whilst Mrs. Malone watched her son (her eldest son) with proud and eager eyes, and pointed him out with undisguised triumph to her immediate neighbours : "That's my son George, coming this way now with Lady Armine Fitzmaurice," or "that is my eldest son, dancing with Betty Redmond." It was

agreed—even by Maria Finny—that Betty looked well, was one of the prettiest girls in the room—in short that she was a great credit to Ballingoole. She was in enviable request, surrounded by would-be partners, and Fred—who had not been quite certain as to how she would “take”—now pestered her for half the dances on her programme, and advertised his intimacy by calling her “Betty” across a set of lancers. George did not mind *him*, but he was really jealous of Ghosty. An innocent hunting friend had pointed him out to him, as “Booked for pretty Betty Redmond. It was true she had next to no fortune, but the Moores all liked her, and it was a settled thing.” His waltz with Betty came at last; it was only number five, so the evening was not so very far advanced, but for him, it was only just about to begin.

“I did not know that the Major danced,” he exclaimed, as he watched his step-father revolving round the room like a big humming-top.

“Yes—he is very fond of balls,” replied Betty, “and, until lately, he wore his full dress tunic on every possible occasion, until it was agony to him, and he said he could not put the tip of his finger inside his waist-belt; now he is at a loss to know what to do with his uniform. What can you suggest?”

“He might stuff it, and set it up in his study, as an effigy of himself,” returned George shortly. “Our next dance is number twelve, is it not? May I see your card?”

“Yes, of course.”

“You are dancing the next with Denis. What sort of a performer is he?”

“Well,” smiling, “I may tell you in confidence, that Fred Moore says in a small room he is dangerous, but he will have lots of scope here.”

“Why do you not give him a square?” expostulated his step-brother.

“I offered him a square—I begged of him, almost with tears in my eyes, but he would not hear of it; as it is, he is offended; ‘out’ with me, as they say.”

“Although you have agreed to sacrifice yourself,” returned George as he led her into a passage. “He deserves to be put to death to slow music.”

In this passage they came face to face with Mrs. Redmond and Belle. Belle, in a yellow gown, was looking quite her best; a slight *soupçon* of rouge set off her dark eyes—eyes that sparkled with unusual brilliancy.

“Oh, Betty, so there you are!”

acosting her, with much animation. "And Mr. Holroyd! We have only just arrived; we had Casey's covered car, and it *is* so slow! I know scarcely anyone here, Mr. Holroyd; so I have put you down for three waltzes and an extra," holding out her programme playfully. "Now you must leave Betty to talk to mother, and to tell her all she has been doing, and *who* gave her that lovely bouquet, and take poor me round the rooms." And before George could realize the fact, she had walked him away, with her neatly gloved hand on his arm, leaving Betty in her own place—yes, Belle was undoubtedly a clever girl. It would have fared ill with Betty, had not Ghosty Moore (with the eye of love) discovered her—for Mrs. Redmond had towed her off to the white drawing-room—the haunt of dowagers only—and there

she seated herself on a sofa beside her victim, and proceeded to cross-examine her, whilst at the same time she endeavoured to “catch the eye” and recognition of various haughty, high-fed old ladies. As long as Belle was enjoying herself, what did it matter about Betty? And *she* did not choose to sit alone; by and by she hoped to figuratively harpoon a substantial county magnate, who would take her down to supper, but she was certainly not going to herd with the Finnys and Malones! However, her young kinswoman was speedily carried off by an eligible young man, to take part in the ensuing waltz, and she was left to the tender mercies of Maria Finny, who had just discovered her—and who, perceiving that the old lady wished to ignore her acquaintance as much as possible, attached herself to her

like a social "burr"—for the remainder of the evening !

Betty watched Belle, and her partner, floating round ; they were admirable dancers both. What a pretty figure Belle had, and how wonderfully long-winded she must be, for her lips were moving incessantly. She talked as it were into her partner's ear the whole time she was dancing, and as she subsequently walked about with him, in conspicuous companionship, her vivacity, her sparkling dark beauty, and smart ball dress, made her the cynosure of many eyes. Mr. Holroyd danced once more with Betty, the dance before supper. He had been, *he* thought, rather clever about this, as he led her, when it was over, into a little boudoir ; there was no one in it but themselves. Now was his opportunity ! Now he would put his

fate in her hands. He stood on the hearth-rug, and lent his elbow firmly on the chimneypiece—but in spite of that, his arm shook; whilst she fanned herself slowly with her new white feather fan, and gazed into the fire.

“I hope you did not mind my leaving you that time,” he began nervously.

“Not at all,” she returned looking up at him; “why should I? Of course it was quite natural that you should go with Belle.”

“You think it quite natural that I should leave you for her?”

“Yes, of course I do,” she answered with a little nod and smile, but her pulses were throbbing fast.

“Then you are mistaken, Betty,” he said leaning towards her. “If I had my own way I would never leave *you* as long as I——”

“Here she is ! the very girl I want !” exclaimed Fred Moore, pushing back the portière.

George turned and looked at him. At this moment he had never seen anyone he disliked as much as Fred, with his round fair head, pink shiny face, comfortable little figure, gold buttons, and grin.

“Come along, Bet, you are engaged to me ; come along,” he called out masterfully. “I am going to take you in to supper. Why, Betty”—scanning her curiously—“what’s this ; you are as red as a rose ; you are actually blushing. I never saw you blush before. Betty, you have performed a *feat* !”

“I—I—how can you be so silly,” she stammered. “I don’t want any supper, but if you like I’ll go with you and look on.”

“Nonsense ; you need not be showing off before Holroyd. You have as fine an appetite as any girl I know ; Holroyd, you come along too—you *may*. We will get to a little table by ourselves, and do a good business with oysters, and truffled boar’s head, and champagne—you could not be in better hands than mine—and that’s sound.”

Perhaps George would have accepted this invitation to the unpopular post of “third” party, but for Belle, who entered with a partner at this moment, and said with an air of playful proprietorship :

“Oh, Mr. Holroyd, this *is* most fortunate ! I know I can depend upon *you* to look after poor mamma—here she is—she says she is quite faint with hunger.”

Mrs. Redmond—who had at last shaken off Maria—was in a bland and chatty

frame of mind, although intensely occupied with various toothsome comestibles—soup, salmon, ducklings, *pâté de foie gras*, all of which received her very best attention. She remained a long time in the supper-room—with George, so to speak, chained to the stake, and never noticed how silent and preoccupied he was ; how often his eyes wandered to a little table, at which sat Betty, Miss Pink, and the brothers Moore, nor how restless he became, after they had risen and departed. Lady Mary was a fussy chaperon, and by the time Mr. Holroyd and his charge had returned to the ball-room, she and her young ladies were nowhere to be seen—they had gone home !

Poor George ! He had never wished Mrs. Redmond at Jericho ! Never !

CHAPTER II.

“FOXY JOE TELLS TALES.”

“For every inch that is not a fool is a rogue.”

—DRYDEN.

MISS PINK, who was in the highest spirits, followed Betty into her bed-room, when they arrived home from the ball, and offered to unlace her dress, if Betty would do the same kind office for her.

“You looked perfectly beautiful,” she exclaimed, kissing her, “and did you not have a lovely time. Oh, *my!*”

Betty agreed that she had had a lovely time, and when, after an hour’s thorough discussion of the events of the evening, she had got rid of her vivacious companion, she wrapped herself in a shawl, and put out the candles, and went and

sat in a deep window seat, to watch for the dawn, and to think. Never before had Betty's thoughts kept her out of bed.

She was not the same gay careless Betty that we had figuratively handed into the old green chariot a week ago. No, her little simple heart now beat with delicious dazzling hopes and then fluttered with dismal dreadful fears. She had made a discovery ; she found that she was continually thinking of George Hollroyd, and that she liked him. Not as she liked Denis Malone, and Fred and Ghosty Moore. No, quite differently. She had a guilty knowledge that she never was so happy as when he was talking to her, and that when he was not present she was continually and secretly watching the door. Alas ! poor Betty, this latter is a truly fatal symptom.

Miss Dopping was a lady who never allowed anything to interfere with her plans. When she fixed an hour for her arrival or departure, nothing less than an earthquake could alter her arrangements. At ten o'clock, the morning after the dance, she and her *protégée* were trotting smartly down the Roskeen avenue, behind a pair of posters, *en route* home. Strange to say, Mr. Holroyd made a pretext for returning to Ballin-goole the following day, although pressed to remain for a most tempting meet. When he had taken his leave, Fred Moore imparted some of his ideas to his brother, over a quiet cigar in the smoking-room.

“I tell you what, Ghosty, that chap Holroyd is head over ears in love with Betty Redmond.”

“Not he,” returned his brother, con-

temptuously. "It's Belle you are thinking of; did you not see him dancing with her, and towing the mother in to supper? What an old woman she is; she reminds me of a walrus shuffling about in black satin."

"Belle asked Holroyd to dance. She has brass enough for anything, and *she* told him off to her mother."

"He is always at Noone," persisted Ghosty, "and every one says that he is after Belle; why, Betty is a mere child; it was only the other day she went into long dresses."

"Child or not, when I went into the oak room the night of the ball, I started a fine covey, or I'm greatly mistaken. He was leaning towards her, speaking as if his life and soul depended on her answer, and her face was as red as fire. She ate no supper, not even lobster salad, and straw-

berry ice ! That's a very bad sign in a girl."

But to all this his brother Augustus turned a scornful face, and a deaf ear.

* * * *

Foxy Joe was no friend to Denis Malone. Denis laughed at him openly, and made a butt of him at Nolan's, and Foxy Joe was fully resolved "to have it in for him," as he expressed it, "*yet*," although he carried his messages meanwhile, and took his money ; for that matter he took every one's messages, from dainty little pink notes from Noone, to a couple of pounds of steak for Mrs. Maccabe. She was his most constant patroness, and he saw a good deal of her, and her niece and book-keeper, pretty Lizzie, who looked *so* demure, as she sat behind a kind of railled-in desk, peering through the bars,

with her bright dark eyes, and shovelling out greasy coppers, with her lady-like white fingers.

"A good girl," said her aunt, in confidence to Jane Bolland (consequently in confidence to the town), "with a great head for figures, and worth her weight in gold, and though I'm against cousins marrying, if she and Dan were to set up together, it would not be a bad thing, and she might drop into *my* shoes!" Ridiculous idea! as if coquettish Lizzie, with her smart dresses and high heels, would ever harangue her customers in a black poke bonnet, much less wield the ox tail with a vigorous arm, and personally visit the slaughter yard!

No! Lizzie in her heart loathed the business; she was rather romantic, and there was no poetry about a butcher's shop, and ribs and briskets. Yes, Lizzie

was decidedly romantic, and it was passing sweet to her, to meet a young gentleman, by stealth, heir to a good old name and property (Heaven help your innocence, Lizzie !) and to walk along lonely lanes, with her head on his shoulder, and his arm round her waist ; she was exceedingly sly, cautious and clever to have kept her secret for a whole year from lynx-eyed Ballingoole. Poor Ballingoole ; that was so badly in want of some new topic of conversation. She frequently sent and received notes, placing them under a certain stone, on a certain wall, that was her private post office. Latterly Lizzie had grown bolder, and during a visit to Dublin she and Denis had had the audacity to go to the theatre, and to the circus in company, and to take a Sunday stroll on Kingstown pier ; and so far they were undiscovered. The even-

ing after Betty had returned home, from ease, and idleness, and play, to economy, and more economy and work, she went for a long walk up what was called "the bog road," to give the dogs a run. This was their favourite direction ; the cabins were few and far between, and contained a fair supply of active cats and not too many furious, ferocious lurchers, only too ready to rush out and attack three peaceable, gentlemanlike little white dogs. On her way home, in a lane not far from Bridgetstown, Betty saw two figures standing near the hedge. At first she scarcely noticed them, but on nearer approach she perceived that they were lovers—a man—a *gentleman*—and a girl ; the girl's hand was on his shoulder ; and she seemed to be speaking to him eagerly, he replying with expressive nods, and then he suddenly raised her face by the chin,

kissed her hastily, and disappeared through an adjacent gap.

They were totally unconscious of a spectator, and as the girl turned back, she came almost face to face with Betty—the girl was Lizzie Maccabe.

“Good evening, miss,” she said in some confusion.

“Lizzie, who was that you were speaking to?” enquired the young lady, in a tone of austere displeasure.

“Indeed, Miss Elizabeth, it was just a friend.”

“I could see *that*, but who was it?”

“Well, then, indeed, Miss Elizabeth, I don’t see what right you have to ask.”

“The same right as I would have to try and put you out, if I saw your clothes on fire, or to throw you a rope if you were drowning. You were walking with a gentleman, Lizzie.”

“And if I was, miss ?” returned Lizzie, flippantly, “sure the road is not mine !”

“If you won’t tell *me*, I shall speak to your aunt ; she had better look after you.”

“Oh, she knows I am very well able to take care of myself,” returned the other pertly, “and since you are so anxious to know, I may as well tell you, that the gentleman was just Mr. Holroyd.”

“Mr. Holroyd,” gasped Betty, who had been almost certain that she had recognised Denis.

“Yes,” continued Lizzie, who lied boldly and well, “why not him as well as another ? He means no harm, nor do I ; a girl must have a bit of fun, as well as young ladies.”

“He kissed you, Lizzie,” said Betty tragically.

“Well, miss, and if he did, you need not pick me eyes out ! We tradespeople

are not so particular as the quality ; he gives me a gold locket, and I give him a kiss, where's the harm ? ”

“ There is great harm, Lizzie ; you are not the girl I took you for.”

“ Maybe then, miss, if you were to look at *home* you would not be so shocked at your neighbours. Maybe there's a worse than *me*—maybe there's a young lady as Mr. Holroyd can kiss for the asking.”

“ I have known you for years, Lizzie, and you and I were in the same class in Sunday school ; rude as you are, I cannot forget that. Promise me that you will give up meeting Mr. Holroyd, and I will keep what I have seen to myself.”

“ Well then, miss,” after a moment's hesitation, and with a curious smile, “ I don't mind if I do give up meeting Mr. Holroyd, just to oblige *you*. I am not so dead set upon him as some people, and

Ballingoole is a shocking place for gossip. And as for Jane Bolland, I wonder the ground does not crack under her ! I must be going now, Miss Elizabeth, and so I will wish you good evening," and she flounced off, tossing her head and swinging her parasol as she went.

Betty walked home very, very slowly ; she was more unhappy than she had ever been in all her life ; her illusions were dispelled ; her little demi-god had fallen from his pedestal, and lay shattered in the dust. A man who could court a pert, vulgar girl like Lizzie Maccabe, was not worth a second thought, nor would he be likely to think of her, but as an unsophisticated country mouse, with whom he could flirt and amuse himself.

Her heart was unusually sore, and she was both silent and depressed, as she took her place at her aunt's scantily-spread

board. Various sayings of George's came back to her now, with an entirely new interpretation ! He had once told her that he thought "Elizabeth" the most beautiful name in the world, and that it exactly suited *her*, doubtless he thought that it suited Lizzie Maccabe still better ! When Mr. Holroyd came over the next afternoon, ostensibly to talk about the ball—in reality to steal (if possible) a few moments with Betty—lo !—she was an ice maiden ! His eager greetings, his anxious efforts to continue where he had left off, were cruelly repudiated, and silenced. What was the reason of her cold, altered manner ?

He could not imagine what had happened to pretty, smiling Betty, within forty-eight hours. Who was this freezingly polite, this pale, and rather silent young lady ; not Betty surely ?

Oh no, this was a member of the family he had never met before ; this was Miss Elizabeth Redmond.

As Lizzie tripped home, giggling at her own cleverness, and at the recollection of Betty's stern, shocked face, she little knew that a Nemesis was on her track, in the shape of Foxy Joe !

Foxy Joe went further afield than most people ; he saw a good deal, he made excellent use of his cunning eyes and capacious ears, and he did not deserve his name for nothing. Denis had recently placed figuratively the last straw on the camel's back, and Joey, screaming with passion, his face grey with fury, had sworn a frightful oath that he would pay him out *soon*. And Denis had laughed derisively ! Would Denis laugh if he knew that Joey had witnessed more than one stolen inter-

view, that he had appropriated more than one note, and that even now *he* was sniggering in his sleeve as he followed Lizzie home ? Lizzie halted in the town, and had a long and interesting gossip with her bosom friend, the dress-maker, whilst Joey slipped down the street, and walked into Mrs. Maccabe's establishment. Mrs. Maccabe was reading the *Freeman's Journal* by the light of a lamp in the front shop, and glowered at Joey and his empty basket, over her horn spectacles.

“ Ye left it ? ” she enquired curtly.

“ Be Gob I did.”

“ And brought no word about beef for corning ? ”

“ Devil a word,” scratching his head, “ I handed in the basket, and passed no remark.”

“ That's strange ! for mostly ye have

as much jaw as a sheep's head," sneered his employer. "And what *kept* you?"

"Faix—I was just watching Miss Lizzie."

"For what? What was she doing? She went to confession at four o'clock."

"Confession, how are ye? And did she tell ye *who* confesses her?" And he looked under his eyebrows, with an unpleasant expression.

"Father Connell, you unfortunate natural, and who else?"

"No—but Father Denis Malone; I saw him confessing her, and slithering and kissing her, in the lane by the horse park, not twenty minutes ago."

Mrs. Maccabe rose hastily, and felt round for the ox tail. Many a time it had descended heavily on the dwarf's shrinking shoulders.

"Joey! I'll give you a lathering

that you'll remember to your dying day," advancing between him and the door. "How *dar* you tell your black lies on a respectable girl like Lizzie?"

"Before the mother of God, and all the blessed saints, I swear I saw her," howled Joey, holding a chair between himself and the virago, and trembling in every limb; but the thought of Denis spurred his flagging courage, and he added, "Sure Miss Betty saw them *too*, and hasn't it been going on this year or more!"

"Ye little lying baste!" she screamed, swinging the tail, and bringing it down with a resounding whack. "Take that, and that, and *that*."

"Oh! Mrs. Maccabe, ma'am! Oh! holy Moses! Oh! well maybe ye can read their writing," and out of a very greasy pocket he unearthed three letters—one

from Denis, and two in the handwriting of the fair Lizzie, written (were further proof required) on bill paper, with a little picture of a fat ox surmounted by “Bridget Maccabe and Sons, Butchers and Salesmen.”

Mrs. Maccabe became yellow (white she could never be), staggered over to the table, laid her weapon down at her right hand, and slowly perused the letter, whilst Joey, armed with a shield, in the shape of a large round basket, watched her narrowly, with his little sly grey eyes.

“If this is *true*, Foxy Joe,” she said at last, removing her horn spectacles, with shaking fingers, “ye had better take the hatchet and choppers out of me reach. I don’t want a murder on me soul! for I believe I could kill her. Her that was a pattern in the convent, and that talked

of a vocation, and of taking the black veil ! Her that can scarcely lift her eyes to a man and that comes of decent people—her that no one has ever been able to say a word against, and *me* that has always kept myself so distant, and so high, and that has always been respected. Oh ! oh ! oh—— !” and—sight never seen before ! sight that dilated Joey’s narrow eyes—Mrs. Maccabe threw her blue checked apron over her head, for once in her life gave way to her feelings, and lifted up her voice and wept.

This strange paroxysm was of brief duration ; she presently dried her eyes, and retreated into her inner parlour, with the letters and the lamp, leaving Joey alone in the dark shop.

An instant later, Lizzie came in, pink-cheeked, brisk, and smiling, and, unaware

of her danger, walked straight into the lion's mouth.

"What's this I am afther hearing about you, Lizzie Maccabe?" enquired her aunt in a strangely forced voice.

"I am sure I don't know!" returned Lizzie, tossing her head, but her face became the colour of ashes, as her eyes fell upon the letters.

"Is it true?" demanded the elder woman hoarsely.

"What?" stammered the culprit.

"That you write letters to that blackguard, Denis Malone, and meet him after dark, and kiss him?"

Lizzie glanced appealingly at Joey, who leant against the wall and nodded his head, and looked at her with a grin of satisfied malice; there was no hope from Joey!

"Yes, it's true," she answered in a whisper.

“Then my house is no place for the likes of you,” said Bridget Maccabe, rising with an air that would have done credit to Sarah Siddons. “There’s the door ; out you go !”

“Oh, aunt, aunt, you don’t mean it ?”

“Come !” taking her roughly by the arm, “I’ll never see your brazen face again.”

“Oh, Aunt Bridget !” cried the wretched girl, falling on the floor, and clasping her by the knees. “Don’t be so angry with me. Sure I would have told you long ago ; only he would not let me. Sure we—we are married.”

“Ye are what ? Get up off the floor, ye shameless hussey.”

“Married,” sobbed Lizzie, “married at a registry office in Dublin last year. Sure haven’t I my ring, and all the papers

at the bottom of the little tin cash-box along with your bank book.”

“Then sit there on that chair, where I can see you, that I may have a good look at the biggest fool that ever drew the breath of life,” and Mrs. Maccabe moved back a few steps, and gazed at her weeping niece, with her arms akimbo.

“Lizzie, you are a wicked, low girl—deceiving them that was good to ye. What will Father Connell say, and the Reverend Mother, and (as an after-thought) the Malones ?”

“I don’t care what they say,” rejoined Lizzie, plucking up a little spirit. “I am Mrs. Denis Malone, and as good as the best, and Denis is the only son and heir.”

“Heir, indeed !” shouted her aunt, “and what are you going to live on, if I may make bold to ask ?”

“The Major——” began Lizzie.

“The Major can’t keep himself—let alone a son and a daughter-in-law. Why *I’m* keeping the Major ! Well, well, to think of it ! First and foremost you will bring down your marriage lines to Father Connell, and then we will get you decently married in chapel, and then we will see how your husband is going to support you ; for mind one thing, my good girl, you won’t live here ; it would ill become the wife of the *heir* of the Malones, to be chopping mate at her aunt’s the butcher. Aye and maybe cutting off the best loin chops for her lady mother-in-law.”

“Maybe the Malones will take us in.”

“Oh, keep your may bees for honey, and talk sense. I think I see the Major arming you in to dinner ; if he does, maybe you’ll remind him of my bill. I

think I see Mrs. Malone and Miss Betty making free with the likes of yeess——”

“Miss Betty ! I saw Miss Betty this evening—she—she—she,” and here Mrs. Denis Malone, frightened and overwrought, suddenly went off into a fit of screaming hysterics, that were quite as protracted and alarming as if she had been born a lady.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. MACCABE HAS IT OUT WITH THE MAJOR.

“He is a fool who thinks, by force or skill,
To turn the current of a woman’s will.”

—S. TUKE.

THE following morning, when the first press of business was over, and when she had taken counsel with her sons, and had locked Lizzie into her room, Mrs. Maccabe put on her shawl (she always wore her bonnet except in bed) and stalked up the street, and out to Bridgetstown. She had never visited it before, and her tall commanding figure in the doorway, gave Sara, the parlour maid, what she subsequently described as a “turn.” Doubtless she gave Mrs. Malone

a turn also, for she firmly believed that she had come for the balance of her bill—a large balance—and tremulously hinted as much.

“Oh no, Mrs. Malone, ma’am ; though in course I’ll be thankful to see my money. I’ve come about something a great deal worse nor that. To make a long story short, your son Denis has destroyed himself.”

“Denis,” shrieked the wretched woman, staggering back against the turf basket. “What is it ? Tell me the worst at once ! Is he dead ? Oh ! what, what has happened to him ?”

“He has happened to get married to my niece, Lizzie Maccabe, at a registry office in Dublin last October ; *that’s* what’s happened to him !”

For a moment Mrs. Malone was speechless ; then she went and sat down very

suddenly on the nearest chair, and put both her hands to her head.

“It’s gospel truth,” continued her visitor. “I only found it out last night. I’m sorry for you, and I’m sorry for meself: it’s a terrible disgrace to us both. Such a thing never happened to a Maccabe before. I am going to get shut of her at wance.”

“Denis must have been mad,” said his mother distractedly. “Are you sure he is married?”

Mrs. Maccabe’s brow now became clothed in thunder.

“Better be mad nor bad, nor worse than he is! He *is* married. I have the lines, and I’ve come up to talk the matter over with the Major, and to see what he will do for his son’s wife. He must take her out of *my* house.”

“Oh, Mrs. Maccabe, could you not

keep it quiet for a little longer, till we think it over. I simply dare not tell his father," said Mrs. Malone piteously.

"But I dar," replied this heroic matron, standing squarely before her meek little customer. "I dar a regiment of the likes of him ; and I'll tell him within the next five minutes. Where's the study ?"

"Oh, give me time—a little time," pleaded Mrs. Malone in tears, "till I consult my eldest son. Oh, there he is ! George, come here."

George, who was equipped for riding, entered, whip in hand, and stared in amazement at his weeping mother, and the butcher's widow. A bill of course.

"It's something awful about Denis—and Mrs. Maccabe's niece. He has married her, and she has been his wife for months," explained his mother with streaming eyes.

George could not restrain a low whistle.

“It was only discovered yesterday, and Mrs. Maccabe is going to tell his father, and don’t *you* agree with me, that we might wait a little, and think it over.”

“No, mother, Mrs. Maccabe is right,” returned her son with decision ; “there must be no delay ; he should be told at once, and the marriage openly acknowledged.”

“You are right, sir,” said Mrs. Maccabe approvingly, “and now I’ll not detain you longer, ma’am, if you will show me the road to the Major’s study.”

“I’ll go with you,” volunteered George gallantly, resolved that the butcher’s widow should not bear the brunt of the fray alone and unprotected. Mrs. Malone was helpless. She stood with her hand-kerchief to her mouth, and watched them go into the study, saw them close the

door, and then rushed back, and buried her head among the sofa cushions, poor coward ! The study was next to the drawing-room, and at first there was the steady humming sound of Mrs. Maccabe's voice, then a roar from the Major, then George spoke, then roar upon roar, like a starving Bengal tiger who sees food.

The Major could not realize the truth at first. He pushed back his chair, thereby capsizing Boozle, who was sleeping comfortably in the paper basket on all the unpaid bills. He gasped, his face became the colour of a boiled beetroot.

“Eh ? What ? What ?” he shouted, and then he rose and figuratively fell upon Mrs. Maccabe, for “a lying, thieving, scheming old harridan, who had ruined his innocent son—an infernal old fosthooke, who had made the match.”

“And what would I get, av you

please?" drawing herself up with an air of superb enquiry. "For why would I marry me niece, a decent girl, to an idle, drunken scutt, that never earned six-pence, a low-minded rapscallion, heir to nothing but debt and his father's bad name? A fine thing to tell Bridget Mac-cabe——" and she looked about her, as if in search of the ox tail.

In vain the Major stormed; here his bellowing and bullying was as water on a rock. To borrow a word from the intrepid widow, she "bested him," as she subsequently boasted—cowed him, silenced him, yea even him.

George was scarcely able to get in one syllable between such a war of words, and two such champions. It was Greek meeting Greek with a vengeance. The Major assumed an attitude of ferocious antagonism that would have struck terror into the

heart of a less valiant opponent, and the battle raged. At last there was a lull ; the man was worn down by the woman's vigorous eloquence, and Mrs. Maccabe calmly stated her ultimatum.

“ The girl should be decently married, as soon as possible, before the priest, and before the Rev. Mr. Mahon, too, if they liked, and Denis Malone should take his wife home. If he passed the medical, he might get something to do.”

“ But he has *not* passed,” bawled the Major. “ I’ve heard by yesterday’s post he has failed for his final examination, and he is done for. The most I’ll do for him will be to give him a steerage passage to Australia, and a five-pound note.”

“ Man, that’s all balderdash and nonsense !”—that the Major should live to be apostrophised as a mere “ man ” ! “ Ye can’t turn your only son out into the

world as ye would an ass on a bog, and him with a wife on his hands—ye bid to provide for him,” responded the widow in a tone of unshaken resolve.

“ Denis might make a good start in Australia,” ventured his step-brother. “ You see he likes a country life: he rides well, and he knows a little about stock, and if he had a small share in a run, just a start, he might do very well.”

“ Then will *you* start him ? ” enquired the Major, turning on him furiously, forgetting the recent plunge he had made into George’s pocket.

“ I am quite unable to do anything at present.”

“ Av *course* the Major will assist his only son. It’s not your place, sir,” said Mrs. Maccabe emphatically. “ The Major will give at least five hundred pounds, and their passages and outfit, and do the

thing respectably, when he is about it," speaking precisely as if the Major were miles away.

He, with his eyes almost starting out of his head, assured her in forcible language (that cannot here be quoted) that he would not do anything of the sort. But this determined woman made him listen to what she called "reason"; she bargained and chaffered with him, as if she were buying a young stall-fed bullock, and when she had left the study, rather hoarse and breathless, she had gained her end.

The Major would give four hundred pounds down on the nail; she herself (poor woman as she was) would put down two more. This money to be lodged in the hands of a respectable, honest man in Melbourne, who would see that Denis did not make ducks and drakes of it, but

invest it prudently. The couple were to be married as soon as possible, and to take ship to Australia. “She would pay her niece’s passage, second class, and give her a sensible outfit, and no one could say but that she had done a handsome thing for a desolate, lorn widow woman, with no one to earn for her but herself, and hard work, and small returns, and *bad* debts. She would not trouble the Major further at present, but maybe he would spake a word to Mr. Denis and tell him that he was not to go next or nigh Bridget Maccabe, as she would not be answerable for herself.”

“Spake a word to Mr. Denis,” but feebly expresses the scene that awaited that young gentleman, as he strolled into the house in time for dinner. He had given the governor a wide berth since the fatal letter had been received the previous

day, and had spent his time most agreeably, in coursing and card playing with some of his boon companions. He had a phlegmatic nature, and an adjustable conscience: it was rather a bore that he had not passed, but he hated the profession, and for the present his mother had assured him that he could live at home, and they would "think it over." He was certain to get something, some agency; he was only twenty-four; there was lots of time! The Major's fury would blow itself out like a gale, so he flattered himself, as he prepared for dinner. A sharp knock at the door, and enter Cuckoo, pale and excited-looking, and evidently bursting with some great news.

"Now then," said Denis, who was belabouring his thick stiff hair with a brush in either hand, "what's up?"

"Everything is up!" returned his

sister tragically. “I thought I would just come in and warn you. Mrs. Maccabe was here this morning ; they know you are married to Lizzie.”

Here Denis let fall a hair brush with a clang.

“It’s not true, is it, Denis ?—that common girl ! I’ve seen her walking with the Police Sergeant, over and over again—and I am sure she greases her hair with suet.”

“Who told ?” enquired Denis fiercely, “and how did it come out ?”

“From all I can hear, it was Foxy Joe that told.”

“Foxy Joe ! Then I’ll break every bone in his crooked body.”

“The Major is raging mad, Denis. I never saw him so bad, and mother has been crying all day. You and Lizzie are to be married in chapel, and to be

packed off to Australia. Mrs. Maccabe will help to send you ; that's all I could get out of George."

This programme was acceptable to Denis ; he was sick of Bridgetstown ; he would gladly go forth and see the world, and begin a new life. Visions of a free, novel, thoroughly untrammelled existence, where he could play cards whenever he pleased, and with whom he pleased, and gallop over miles of good going, on a well-bred waler, instantly rose before his mind's eye (an eye that kept a sharp look out on its own interest). After all, "Lizzie's row," as he called it, was bound to come some day ; best have the two rows together, he said to himself philosophically ; the row about his exam., and the row about his wife : as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb ; and he descended, with a certain

amount of dogged courage, to face the storm !

A storm indeed ! A typhoon, that raged in the latitude of Bridgetstown for ten whole days. During occasional lulls, Denis was married in chapel and in church, passages were taken, money paid in, letters written, outfits procured.

The news of Denis Malone's match ran through the neighbourhood like wildfire, and people said that "he would never do a day's good at home ; he was well out of the country, and that for *once* the Major showed some sense." Here the Major got credit for wisdom that was not his own ; his share of the money he had raised by giving a bill on the furniture at Bridgetstown, and he was so furious with his son that he actually thought him a cheap riddance at the price.

But Denis's mother was heartbroken :

she wept, she implored, she even went on her knees to her husband for her poor dear boy. She abased herself before Mrs. Maccabe (who was now a connection), and it was all of no avail ; that great woman was inexorable, and the bitterest drop in all her cup was the knowledge that Denis, her darling, was *glad* to go.

In intervals of pleading and weeping, she prepared his shirts and clothes, and packed up some portion of the household linen and (but this is in strict confidence) some of the Major's silk socks and handkerchiefs, his second-best top-coat, a rarely remembered gold watch, and a dozen silver forks and spoons, also the pink topazes for Lizzie—or it might be another relative. A few came forward with presents for the young couple. George gave his brother a saddle and bridle, and a gun. Mrs. Finny presented

him with an old case of surgical instruments. Maria gave him a piece of her mind. Miss Dopping gave Lizzie a first-rate sewing machine, and a long lecture, concluding with this pleasant little prophecy :

“If you come to want, and to earn your bread, Lizzie Malone, as I honestly believe you will, this machine, if you work it industriously, will keep you from actual starvation. You will have to support your husband too—unless you can keep him away from cards, and whisky.”

“I think I’ll be able to do that, ma’am,” returned young Mrs. Malone confidently ; “and if the worst comes to the worst, I can always make my living as a cashier in a shop. I am very fond of Denis, but I’ll never earn *his* bread.”

In which sentiment Lizzie displayed a

flash of her aunt's high spirit. Betty Redmond presented Lizzie with a warm shawl for the voyage, Belle gave her her photograph, and Mrs. Redmond, with much pomp, presented her with a case of needles (marked two shillings). Thus, endowed with gifts and advice, the young couple set out to seek their fortune in the new world. Major Malone personally conducted them down to Queenstown, saw them on board the steamer (in case they should miss it), and waved them away from the shores of old Ireland with his best red silk pocket-handkerchief.

The news about Denis Malone fell like a thunderbolt at Noone. Juggy brought up the intelligence from the gate lodge to the kitchen, and from the kitchen it flew upstairs. Mrs. Redmond wagged her head, and cast up her eyes, and said "that, after *that*, nothing would surprise

her." Belle laughed maliciously: she was glad of a bit of excitement. She was delighted that Denis was in trouble and going to "get the sack," for she knew that he bore her no good will, and might possibly interfere with her prospects ; and Betty, who was deeply relieved, was both glad and sorry. She had been almost rude to Mr. Holroyd—thanks to Lizzie's daring falsehood ; and how was she to excuse herself ? How could she explain that she had mistaken him for Denis ? She must make amends for her blunder at the first opportunity ; but this opportunity never occurred. An urgent, nay an angry invitation, summoned him to stay with his Uncle Godfrey. When he came over to make his adieux at Noone, he found all the ladies at home. Betty was herself again, and her bright face was all smiles. But it was now *his* turn to be

cold and irresponsible. He did not understand nor respect a girl who could change like a weather-cock. She would be an uncomfortable sort of wife; if she meant to have accepted him, she must have known what was trembling on his lips that night at Lord Enniscorthy's ball, and her manner, when they next met, had been intended to show him unmistakably that she did not wish to hear what he had to say—and he would now be for ever silent. He was glad to go away from her neighbourhood, to where, among new scenes, he might forget her. He was glad to leave that miserable home, where a weeping mother, an irascible step-father, an intolerable brother, had recently made him their confidante, go-between and victim.

“Yes,” in answer to Belle's pathetic enquiries. “He was coming back, of

course, before his leave was up : he had got an extension : he did not return to India till July—the end of July.” Belle sighed a heart-breaking sigh, as she placed her hand timidly in his, and breathed a fervent inward prayer, that when he returned to the gorgeous East he would take her with him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAJOR RECEIVES HIS LAST TELEGRAM.

“ He that dies pays all debts.”

—THE TEMPEST.

THE winter waned, spring came in with showers and lambs and primroses, but brought few changes in Ballingoole. Mrs. Redmond’s health was now failing perceptibly. She rarely went forth in the bath-chair, and leant more and more on Betty.

Mrs. Malone complained incessantly of face-ache and looked proportionately wretched, and was occasionally seen stealing out of Mrs. Maccabe’s parlour, where she had been “ having a read ” of one of Lizzie’s letters, for Denis was a miserable correspondent. The young people were

doing well, and Lizzie proudly informed her aunt that "no one out there knew her from a real lady," but this was a mistake on Lizzie's part, and ignorance is bliss.

The Major was more from home than formerly, and received more telegrams and more bills than of yore, was as red in the face as a Christmas turkey-cock, and was waited on by his household with an even greater amount of assiduous apologetic attention. Cuckoo and Betty scoured the country with the dogs, or sat with their heads bent over an atlas or a French dictionary, and Miss Dopping, a prisoner in the fetters of rheumatism, occupied her usual seat in the window, and watched passing events, and delivered powerful and pungent criticisms on men, women, and things. As for Belle, she read novels and drank tea, and wrote letters (George Hol-

royd was frequently favoured), refurbished her wardrobe against his return, and mentally—oh, happiest moments! made an extravagant catalogue of her trousseau and Indian outfit.

One evening, as Mrs. Redmond and her two companions were sitting at tea, the door burst open, and Maria Finny hurried in unannounced. She wore an old garden hat and shawl, and had evidently come in by the back way, and kitchen entrance.

“There’s terrible work at Bridgetstown,” she panted, “and I have just run over to tell you.”

“What, what has happened this time?” enquired Belle, with bright excited eyes.

“The Major is dead.”

“Dead!” echoed Mrs. Redmond.
“Nonsense!”

“Yes, went off in an apoplexy, or a stroke. Mrs. Malone looked into the study

an hour after lunch (indeed it was about Jane Bolland's bill), and you know he was always a heavy eater. She saw him lying face downwards on the table, with a telegram in his hand. She screamed to Jane, and between them they lifted him up, and he was dead, stone dead, with the red cat sitting beside him. Mrs. Malone has been from one faint into another ever since, and I just ran over to tell you," and she gasped for breath.

After this announcement there was a profound silence for some seconds, and then Betty said :

"How dreadful ! How sudden ! Why I was speaking to him this morning as he drove past the gate."

"Well, you will never speak to him again," returned Maria, emphatically.

"Poor Mrs. Malone," continued Betty. "Who is with her and Cuckoo ?"

“No one, so I just come to fetch you, Betty ; you know the ways of the house ; they are used to you, and there must be some one to keep things together. They say Mrs. Malone is in for some illness from the shock, and you know what Cuckoo is. She has been screeching and crying ever since it was found, at three o’clock.”

Yes, the big, burly, loud-voiced Major that had driven past the gate flourishing his whip a few hours ago was now merely “it,” and had been laid out on the study sofa, awaiting the county coroner.

“May I go, Aunt Emma ?” enquired Betty. “I think I might be of some use. I can nurse a little, and I know all the keys.”

“To be sure you can go,” returned her cousin promptly, “get ready at once.”

Betty’s services at such a time would

cement the intimacy between the families, and draw the houses of Noone and Bridgetstown more closely together ; of course George would be coming home. Then, to Maria : “Have you telegraphed for Mr. Holroyd ?”

“No, I never thought of him. I am glad you reminded me.”

“Shall I telegraph ?” said Belle eagerly.

“Oh no, just give me his address, and I will send a wire as I pass the post office. Dr. Moran is up there. He can do no harm to a man once he is dead, but we shall want some one with some sense. From what I can gather, affairs are in an awful state. I should not be surprised if the creditors seized the body ; there will be nothing but debts coming in to the widow.”

“Oh, I hope not, poor woman,” said Mrs. Redmond sympathetically.

“This was the Derby day, you know, and the Major has lost tremendously. He backed some horse for a great deal, and the telegram in his hand said : ‘King Canute not placed.’”

“You don’t think he—he made away with himself ?” said Mrs. Redmond in a mysterious manner.

“Oh, no ; it was just this bad news on the top of a very heavy lunch that killed him. Dr. Moran said it was—not that *he* knows much about it.”

“Still, I suppose he knows apoplexy from suicide,” said Belle briskly.

Leaving Maria to enlarge on the tragedy and the dismal prospects of the Malones, Betty hurried away to put on her hat, and to pack a small hand-bag with necessary articles, and in a very short time she and Maria were walking over to Bridgetstown in the cool summer night.

At Bridgetstown all was confusion ; lights were flitting from window to window, and crowds of “well-wishers to the family,” pervaded the kitchen, passages and hall. Luckily Miss Dopping and Mrs. Maccabe had arrived upon the scene. The former locked the study, and then cleared the upper passages of sympathetic and excited neighbours, whilst Mrs. Maccabe made very short work of the lower regions ; even Jane Bolland (who almost represented the local press) was swept out as mercilessly as Foxy Joe. By twelve o’clock at night, Betty was left alone, and was the temporal head of that large, silent, disorganised mansion. Cuckoo had cried herself to sleep, and Mrs. Malone was in a kind of restless slumber. She went round the house with a candle in one hand, and a bunch of keys in the other, carefully bolting doors and windows, and

locking up presses and drawers. Next day the inquest was held, and Mrs. Malone was seriously ill, rambling in her mind, and calling for Denis, or thanking George in extravagant terms for his great generosity, pleading with the creditors for time, and with the Major for money, and showing threatening symptoms of brain fever. On Betty fell all the responsibility until George's arrival. She answered notes of enquiry, saw people, wrote letters, ordered mourning, nursed Mrs. Malone, and managed the housekeeping. Belle strolled up in the afternoon and looked over the house, critically examined the old silver wine coolers, and branch candlesticks, wondered if they were Malone or Holroyd heirlooms ? and then returned to Noone to practise some songs for George, specially that one of almost deadly significance :

“ *Si vous n'avez rien à me dire.*”

The following morning George arrived, pale, dusty, and haggard from incessant travelling.

“ You here,” he said to Betty, as she met him on the stairs. “ How good of you ; I half expected to find you.” He went up immediately, and saw his mother in her darkened room. She stretched out both her thin, hard-worked hands, and exclaimed, “ *Denis!* No, it’s George.”

“ George, I am thankful you have come. Betty is here too. You and she must manage everything. Oh, my poor head ! Oh, George, wasn’t it dreadful ? I think I am going mad, I am sure I am ;” and then she began to wander and talk about Denis. “ Oh, my dear boy, *such* a bill from Nolan’s for you. I don’t know what I am to do about it. I can never, *never* squeeze it out of the house-keeping money. Last time, you know,

I sold two dozens of the large silver forks and an old teapot, but I am always in terror lest they should be missed."

Betty hurried George away, before his mother began to talk about *him*. He and Belle seemed a good deal on her mind, and she would urge him imploringly to "have nothing to say to Belle Redmond. She is just a garrison hack, and very selfish, giddy, and ill-tempered. I wish you would fall in love with Betty ;" it would never do for this constant appeal to come to George's ears. Next to Denis's debts it was ever on her tongue. "George, you have been *so* good to me, I wish you had a nice wife ! I wish you would marry Betty Redmond. She may not be as handsome as Belle ; but she is young and pretty, and good ; oh, *do* marry Betty Redmond."

Betty, who had almost driven him out

of his mother's room, said with her finger on her lips :

“ She must be kept perfectly quiet and know nothing. Her mind has had a great shock, but if left quite undisturbed she will rally ; so Dr. Moran says. Now if you will come downstairs, I will get you some breakfast. I daresay you are very hungry.”

Whilst he sat over his meal, Betty gave him a hasty outline of what had occurred ; of what she had done ; of what there was to do ; and handed him a truly formidable packet of letters—chiefly bills.

“ And now that you have arrived,” she concluded, “ I think I shall go home. I can come up here every day, and stay from morning till evening.”

“ No, no, please do not,” he interrupted hastily. “ I could never get along alone.

You would not expect me to do the housekeeping. Who is to nurse my mother, and befriend Cuckoo, and look after the servants ? If you will only stay for a short time, you will be doing us the greatest kindness. My mother is so fond of you. You said you were her eldest daughter, and I am sure you would not desert her now."

And Betty remained. Pale-faced hysterical Cuckoo was her shadow, helpless but affectionate, following her in and out of the rooms, and in and out of the house, like a dog. Betty wrote, and sewed, and nursed, and personally interviewed anxious callers, undertook all arrangements about the luncheon after the funeral, hemmed black hat-bands, and made Cuckoo's frock. At first it seemed strange to George, that he and Betty should be virtually the head of this

large, disorderly house, sitting opposite to each other at meals, just as if they were the real master and mistress, and laying their heads together in many anxious consultations over grave matters. Betty was an invaluable nurse, so light-footed, cheerful and firm ; she spent a good deal of her time in the invalid's room, and George passed many weary hours in the study, endeavouring to evolve some order out of chaos. Each morning the post-bag was heavy with bills, large, clamouring, and alarming. There were bills to take up and renew, there were mortgages, there was every description of angry dun. Major Malone's creditors had long passed from the obsequious to the formally polite, the polite to the freezingly-laconic, from the freezingly-laconic to the threatening stage.

George's cheek burnt, as he glanced at

some of these effusions, and his head ached, and his heart sank, as he went over them. Dozen after dozen. What were company's accounts or mess accounts in comparison to these? At length he called in the aid of the family solicitor, and between them they endeavoured to reach the bottom of affairs. After groping for several days, among a perfect sea of debts, they came to the conclusion that Major Malone—who had never known any personal inconvenience from want of money, who had brow-beaten all his creditors, and who had the most imposing funeral that had been seen for years in those parts—had died as much a pauper as if he had breathed his last in the county workhouse. The place was gone from the Malones for ever. Also the farms, the stock, the silver, and the furniture. All that Mrs. Malone could

claim or carry from her home was her own exceedingly shabby wardrobe. She and Cuckoo were literally penniless ; her jointure had been disposed of, and gambled away ; she had not a pound in the world ; her very bed was the property of a money-lender ; there was not a scrap of salvage out of the wreck. Loud-voiced angry men and women, some with hooked noses, pervaded the avenue and grounds, and the house was almost in a state of siege !

“What was to be done ?” George asked himself, as with a burning head he walked up and down the long garden walk in the cool June evening, after hours spent in writing letters, and holding interviews. He must get his mother and Cuckoo away to some quiet suburb near Dublin, where Cuckoo could be sent to school, and where they could live

cheaply. To ensure their existing at all, he must at once hand over almost the whole of his own private income; four hundred a year would be little enough for them to live upon, for his mother was a bad manager, and had caught her husband's craze for running up bills. Yes, he saw nothing for it but to relinquish his own small fortune. This he could contemplate with equanimity; he could live without it.

But another duty was ten times more difficult. He must give up Betty. How could he relinquish Betty? How was he to live without *her*?

* * * * *

Betty had long ago made her peace, though she had never breathed a word of her mistake that evening in the meadow lane. Absence had not obliterated her image from his mind—quite the reverse.

He saw her now in the fierce light that beats upon people with whom you live in hourly contact. He saw her devotion to his mother. Her unselfishness and energy, and cheerfulness, were all made known to him. She was not merely a very pretty acquaintance, with lovely grey eyes and a merry laugh, who sat a horse to perfection. She was something more in his eyes ; she was the girl he loved.

He never cast a thought to Belle. Betty had swept her out of his mind, and, so to speak, closed the door. She came to Noone, almost daily, and looked into his face with a tender sisterly sympathetic gaze, and asked for his dear mother, and sighed, and “hoped that Betty was of some use ! She was a good, willing child, and fond of nursing, though, perhaps, a little brusque

and rough. Now I myself," said Belle, "am so exquisitely sensitive, that I cannot bear to see grief or pain ; it makes me *ill*, but I have felt for you acutely. I have thought so much of you, dear Mr. Holroyd, in all your trouble," and tears actually trembled on her lashes—theatrical tears.

"Words are cheap," thought George as he walked with her to the avenue gate, when she bade him a lingering good-bye. Give him deeds—one night of watching, against fifty pretty speeches. His eyes were opened widely now, and he appraised pretty, worldly, selfish, Belle at her true value.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

“Meet me by moonlight alone,
And then I will tell you a tale.”

—J. A. WADE.

IT was the very last evening at Bridgetstown, a lovely one, towards the end of June; never had the place (now passing for ever from the Malones) looked to greater advantage. The pleasure-ground was quite a blaze of roses, and all the garden walks were bordered by fragrant mignonette, wallflower and sweet pea. Mrs. Malone, who was now convalescent, and able to be downstairs, was holding a melancholy and final interview with Miss Dopping and the Finnys—she and Mrs. Finny mingling their tears, whilst

Maria and Miss Dopping kept up a cross fire of would-be consolatory remarks. The Malones were leaving for Dublin the next morning, and Betty, who had been packing hard for three days, came out with Cuckoo for a breath of air, and a farewell round of the pleasure-grounds and garden. But Cuckoo was presently summoned indoors, and Betty was left alone—she was tired, very tired, and seating herself on the steps inside the garden gate, with her chin resting on her hand, looked up at the full silver moon, with a face almost as white as her dress.

George, who had been solacing himself with a cigar, descried her from a distance, and hastened to join her; he scarcely ever got a chance of having a word with her alone now, and here was a long-sought opportunity. The evening

breezes blew across their faces, and brought with them the scents of thousands of roses, the very spirit of summer seemed riding on the night, and summoning all people out of doors—to come and do her homage, but the only two at Bridgetstown who stood among the moonlit flowers were George Holroyd and Betty Redmond.

“Well, this is the last night at Bridgetstown!” he said, “and the old place is looking its best, as if it was determined to haunt our memories. There is the yellow rose I helped you to nail up—do you remember? I think I deserve one—as a memento.”

“Then I am sure you may help yourself,” she returned composedly.

“No, I want *you* to give me one.”

“Very well,” rising and breaking off a heavy-headed yellow rose.

“I shall never see this old tree again,” he said, as he took it from her. “Nor the house and grounds of Bridgetstown —nor—nor——”

“Nor any one in Ballingoole,” she added, without raising her eyes.

“Do not say that,” he returned gravely; “I hope to see every one, and above all to see you, Betty. What should we have done without you?”

“It was nothing,” she replied, reseating herself wearily. “I have always been at home here, long,” looking at him with a somewhat watery smile, “before you came! When are you going back to India? Soon?”

“As soon as I have settled my mother comfortably in Dublin.”

“Then to-morrow will be good-bye?”

“No, I shall run down again for a day. Betty, I want to ask you something;”

he latterly called her by her Christian name quite naturally. “ You remember when we came back from Roskeen, where we had always been such good friends—had we not ? ”

Betty nodded, and stared at an enormous bush of lavender, with a somewhat fixed expression.

“ Afterwards, when I met you at home, you would scarcely speak to me, or even look at me—will you tell me the reason of this ? for I know you are a girl who always *has* a reason for her actions.”

“ Yes—if you wish it very much—I will,” she answered, drawing a pattern in the gravel with the toe of her shoe, “ but I would much rather not tell you.”

“ And I would so much rather that you did tell me.”

“ It—it was only the evening after I came home—I made a mistake—I

was in the meadow lane, and I saw Lizzie Maccabe and a gentleman ; he seemed very fond of her—and she said that it was *you*."

"I am sure I am excessively obliged to her ! And so that was the reason ! Oh, Betty, how could you believe her—surely you know by this time *who* it is that I care about."

Betty's heart beat fearfully fast, but she managed to control her voice, and to say quite naturally :

"I thought you were to carry that yellow rose to India—you are picking it to pieces, and will have nothing left but the stalk."

George also exercised all his self-command ; hot, passionate words, that came flocking to his lips, were fiercely forced back, by common sense, honour and reason. He had no right to ask

this girl, who had seen nothing of the world, to share his present poverty. He must first work for her, and then win her. Nevertheless he could not go without *one* word, without some frail hope, were it but a look or a flower, and his heart sank within him when he thought of Ghosty Moore. Oh, if he and Betty were but the real master and mistress of that fine old house behind them, how happy he would be ! But what was the good of wishing—he was going to India. In ten days' time, the seas would be rolling between him and Betty.

“I want you to tell me something else,” he said. “I should like to hear your opinion about a friend of mine. A man I know very well.” His voice shook a little as he mentioned this. “He is desperately in love with a girl, but

he has lost every penny of his money, and does not think it honourable to ask her to bind herself to him in any way, until his lot is more assured. Do you think if *she* knew this, and supposing that she cared about him—she would trust in his silence, and wait, say, a year?"

No answer for quite a long interval—for Betty could not find her voice. Suddenly she stood up and glanced at his pale, tense face.

"Well—what do you think?" he asked in a low, eager tone.

"I am sure she would."

"Would *you*, if you were *she*?" he enquired, and his voice shook.

"Yes," she responded, almost in a whisper.

Betty looked at him, the veil was drawn between their two souls, and they knew each other's hearts.

To George, her eyes seemed to speak all that was sweetest and best in the world ; he took the little hand that still held a rose, and removing the flower, kissed it reverently and fervently. What a cold, trembling little hand it was ! How quickly it was withdrawn. For at this supreme moment, the inevitable Cuckoo came running to the gate and peering eagerly through, called : “ Betty, where are you ? Bet, come in, mother wants you immediately ! ” And Betty hastily snatched her fingers away, and turned to face Mrs. Malone’s untimely emissary—her future sister-in-law. George loved her past all doubting, truly ; with this conviction in her heart, she moved to the gate which he held open. George loved her, that was enough. What was money—what was time, what was anything ? She would wait for him for

years—for ever. As she walked slowly back through the fragrant pleasure-grounds she seemed to be treading on air, although Cuckoo dragged from her arm, with an exceedingly earthly weight.

Strange to say, that usually unguarded young lady made no remark beyond some incoherent suggestions about Boozle and his basket, but for the remainder of the evening she was amazingly silent—unnaturally solemn, and followed George with deeply inquisitive and interested eyes—Betty had returned to her packing.

The scene inside the gate, embowered in roses, handsome George kissing Betty's hand, and Betty standing so tall and white, like some young queen, was photographed on her memory for ever ; she was a notoriously sharp young person, and the picture only ratified what she had long suspected, that George

and Betty were in love with each other.

In a few days, Mrs. Malone and Cuckoo, Crab and Boozle, were installed in a small, detached house, close to a church, post office and train. George had done his best for his mother. For her, he had given up his furlough schemes—his private income, save fifty pounds, and his present hopes. She wept in gasps upon his shoulder, and sobbed out “that he was the best of sons, no one was like him, no one,” urgently suggested that he should apply to his Uncle Godfrey for an allowance—and in her heart loved Denis ! To feel herself the free, unfettered owner of a small, but comfortable villa ; at liberty to come and go, and spend and cry just as much as she pleased was (but this is for your private ear) a truly blessed relief ! She wore

the outward garb of woe, and used mourning paper, with inch deep black border, and envelopes so woeful that scarcely room was left for an address, and publicly bemoaned the late dear Major, and actually imagined that she was his truly disconsolate widow.

George's departure was sudden ; a telegram gave him forty-eight hours to embark, and he instantly took the train for Ballingoole, ostensibly to make some final family arrangements, but in reality to say good-bye to Betty.

His visit was quite unexpected. Betty was in the garden, picking strawberries for preserving. Mrs. Redmond was lying down, and Belle was standing disconsolately in the drawing-room window, staring at the lawn, the fir trees, and the grey clouds that hung over a distant low range of hills, betokening either rain or heat.

“Mr. Holroyd,” said the parlour-maid abruptly, and she sprang round, her whole face transformed from gloom to sunlight in one second.

“Oh, I am so glad to see you,” she cried, holding out both hands, “we did not know when we were to expect you.”

“I came down to-day only for an hour. I got my orders this morning, and I’m off to-morrow—sail in the *Malabar* on Saturday.”

Belle’s nostrils quivered, but for once she restrained herself; she merely said: “How is your mother?”

“Wonderfully well and cheerful; she has found some old friends already, and is beginning to feel at home.”

“And Cuckoo?” with very forced composure.

“Cuckoo goes to school, and, strange to say, likes it. I hope Mrs. Redmond is well.”

“No, she is but poorly to-day. I am afraid she will not be able to come down and wish you good-bye. How we shall miss you,” then “How *I* shall miss you, for you cannot think—you can never know—what your society has been to me in this hateful, melancholy place ! Now it will be ten times more dreary than ever,” and there were tears in her voice.

Silence—an uncomfortable but golden silence. George looked steadily at one particular patch in the carpet ; Belle always talked in this exaggerated way ; he wished she would not be quite so confoundedly personal.

“Where is Betty ?” he enquired in a would-be cheerful tone.

“Oh, out with the dogs—somewhere about the place. Do you want to see her ?”

(“Did he want to see her ? Did he

want to see his queen, his star, his goddess ?") Should he give Belle a hint ?—No.

"Yes, I should like to wish her good-bye."

"She is probably in the garden making herself ill with fruit !" said her cousin ill-naturedly.

"Oh, you must not go just yet" (seeing that he was about to rise), biting her lips to retain her composure, "you will not forget us—and you will write often, will you not ?" she added desperately ; her eyes fixed anxiously on his.

"Yes, I shall certainly write ; it is very good of you to wish for my letters."

"They will be my only happiness," was her most embarrassing reply ; "you won't forget me, will you, George ?" she whispered. George rose hastily, this conference was too personal to be pleasant ;

this pretty little woman, with the tragic dark eyes, was becoming a nuisance.

“I hate saying good-bye,” holding out his hand as he spoke. “But I must be making a start, my train goes at five o’clock, and I have not much time to lose.”

“Oh, you have an hour still ; it won’t take you more than half that time to get to the station,” she pleaded in a strangled voice.

(Yes, quite true, but he had yet to see Betty, and every moment was priceless.)

“I must really go,” he said firmly, “I have business at Bridgetstown.”

Belle stood up as white as a ghost, and gazed at him despairingly.

It was not alone George Holroyd who was going, it was her life, her hopes, her future ; she felt more than half inclined

to throw herself into his arms, but something in his face arrested her intention, and she merely gave him her hand, and turning away her face, sank in a heap upon the sofa, in a storm of hysterical tears—and George escaped. To look back would have been to emulate Lot's wife ; to linger was destruction.

As he left the house, he gazed anxiously about him, and then he descried a welcome trio—three little white dogs trotting along from the direction of the garden, and presently a tall, girlish figure carrying on her arm a good-sized basket of strawberries. A lovely colour came into her face as she recognised him. He seized her hand eagerly, and said :

“ I was afraid I might miss you ! I got sudden orders, and I start to-morrow, so I just ran down to say good-bye to you.”

He still retained her hand in his, whilst the dogs sat round, staring at him affectionately, as if giving the young couple their countenance and consent ; the little group was commanded by the drawing-room windows, but, luckily for them, Belle's jealous eyes were buried in the sofa cushions.

“ Will you walk down to the gate ? ” he asked, releasing her hand, and taking the basket. “ I left the car there—I have still to go up the town, and my time is very, very short.”

They walked down that miserably short avenue, almost in total silence ; how many things they would think of to say, *afterwards*. How passionately they would regret this sinful waste of five minutes—precious, golden minutes—but the truth was, they were determined to be very brave, and their hearts were too full to

speak. When they came near the gate they halted, for at the gate itself stood Juggy with the key in her hand. She locked and unlocked the entrance to Noone as rigorously as if it were a jail, but if people could go in and out without *her* help, her occupation and her sixpences would be gone, and Mrs. Redmond winked at the arrangement—as she gave Juggy no wages.

“Give me one token, Betty, before I go,” he urged in an eager whisper. “Once you promised me whatever I asked for ; give me that little silver brooch you are wearing.”

Betty unpinned it hastily, and put it in his hand ; a shabby little “Mizpah” brooch ! a present from Belle.

“Good-bye, God bless you, Betty !” he said in a husky, unsteady voice.

She raised her eyes to his, they were

dim with tears, but love is easily satisfied, and the farewell look they interchanged, contented them for many a day. They knew that they could trust each other. In another moment he was gone, and the shabby iron gate had clanged behind him. She would catch one last glimpse as he repassed to the train, and—*No—no*, she must not cry yet. Leaving her basket under a bush, she raced along by the demesne wall, for fully a quarter of a mile, to where it ended, and gave place to a white paling lined with shrubs, and overshadowed by trees: here she took her station and waited patiently, listening with a beating heart for the rattle of the hack car on the hard, dusty highway. It came at last, nearer and nearer; she would not discover herself, no, she only wanted one last look. He was on the far side, but oh, comfort! Oh, happy

moment ; he turned and gazed back at Noone, until the car flew round the corner, and carried him finally out of her sight. Yes, he was really gone. Then Betty crept out from the bushes, and sat down upon a log, and to the amazement of her three companions, sobbed aloud. She dared not cry like this indoors, where walls had ears ; here the old beeches were her kind sympathetic friends. If she were seen at Noone, indulging in such grief, she would be asked to explain the reason of her tears. But that was her secret, and George's.

CHAPTER VI.

“ THINE ONLY.”

“ Infinite riches in a little room.”

—MARLOWE.

GEORGE HOLROYD’s departure left an aching void, a desolate blank at Noone. Belle missed him acutely ; here was another disappointment, the last and worst ! Betty shed secret tears, and even Juggy, at the gate, openly and loudly bemoaned, “ that fine open-handed young gentleman.”

Belle was not in love with George, but she liked him, and his departure, without one word of significance, threw her into a paroxysm of angry despair. She severely cross-examined Betty as to whether he had said anything about *her*, when she

had met him in the avenue, also as to whether he looked at all sorry or cut up ?

Betty admitted that he had (this with a rather guilty conscience—How could she tell her fierce questioner that his regrets were for herself ?) and that deeply dissatisfied lady relapsed into low spirits, a fractious temper, and her old clothes. She wrote to George steadily, and he in return sent her amusing descriptions of his voyage out, of his station, of his munshi, and of his dogs, invariably concluding with some message to Betty—which Belle did not consider it worth while to repeat. Her only hope now—and that a faint one—was that George would write to her to join him ; and in her letters, she mentioned more than once how sincerely she *envied* him living in warm sunny India instead of rainy, melancholy, dull Ballin-goole ; and imparted her views and senti-

ments with a charming disregard of conventional restraint. He had always been a most appreciative and attentive acquaintance, but alas ! he had never let fall anything approaching to an offer of marriage. He had given her songs, books, photographs, but there had never been a hint of offering himself. "Not as yet," whispered hope.

She read large extracts of his letters aloud to eager and interested Betty, and interested and puzzled Maria Finny, and indeed there was no reason why she might not have read them straight on from—Dear Miss Redmond to Yours Sincerely, for there was not a line that even Jane Bolland at the post office could weave into a romance ; and she talked of "her letters from Mr. Holroyd" so constantly, and carried them about her person so ostentatiously, that Maria began

to fear she was engaged ; and even Betty could barely stifle the mutterings of the green-eyed monster. The summer was a dull one, especially to Belle ; far be it from *her* to fish or boat on the canal, or to go in quest of mushrooms or blackberries in high-heeled French boots. There were hopeless wet days, which drowned the hay and flowers, and subsequently made the country intensely and patriotically green. There were a few picnics, a few gatherings, where crowds of pretty girls were expected to amuse one another, and men were in a deplorable minority, and even then, stout elderly fathers of families, and married curates. Belle and Betty partook of some of these festivities ; the latter was a girl who enjoyed herself anywhere, who was happy in the society of young people of her own age, who played tennis, climbed hills, made salad, and boiled

kettles, with a merry beaming face, and did not care if there was not one representative of the sterner sex among the company, since the only man *she* wished to see, was thousands of miles away at the other side of the world. But not so Belle. Oh, dear no. Her temper and her face were the unerring barometer by which you might judge of the number of the men at a party. If there was a respectable muster, and one of these had singled her out for special attention, had walked with her, talked with her, and made love to her, she was all smiles and sprightliness on her way home. If, on the other hand, she had had no cavalier, she made herself conspicuously disagreeable ; sat aloof and sulked, refused to sing, refused to play tennis, presently announced an agonising headache, and withdrew at an early hour, carrying poor Betty in her train.

“The idea!” she would grumble, as they jolted homeward in a local cover-car. “I call it an insult for people to ask us to drive nine miles, and to wear our best dresses, in order to walk round a weedy old garden, with a pack of giggling girls, and to play tennis in grass that is nearly up to one’s knees! I shall never go again, *never!*”

This was her frequent threat, but the next invitation was invariably accepted, and the excitement of looking over her dresses, speculating on her chances of amusement, and fighting with her mother for the money for new gloves and the fare of a car, occupied her until the event (possibly another insult) came off!

Betty had always enjoyed herself, and said so frankly, and stood up for the company, the hosts, and the garden.

“Of course *you* think it very fine,”

Belle would rejoin scornfully, "because you know no better—walking arm in arm through cabbages with Katie Moore is the height of bliss to *you*—you don't know what pleasure is!"

Betty had nevertheless a very good idea of what it meant, when her birthday brought her long letters from Mrs. Malone, and Cuckoo, and the former despatched a box containing what she said was "a little souvenir from George, which he hoped she would do him the honour to accept." Betty's heart beat double time, as she carefully removed the wrappings; he had been gone now for five months, and this was the first token he had sent her. The wrapping gave place to a morocco leather case, and in that case was a massive gold Indian bangle on which was inscribed one word in strange characters that looked like

hieroglyphics, or was it merely a bit of ornament? She could not tell—the letters—if they were letters—stood out in high relief. At any rate it was a lovely bangle and she had but little jewellery, but that was not the reason why she kissed it so tenderly. How good it was of him! and this was not her only present; there was a gold thimble from Katie Moore, a pin-cushion from Cuckoo, and a ten-pound note from Miss Dopping, which was enclosed in a letter delivered by Foxy Joe—a letter bidding her buy something *for herself*, and please her old friend, Sally Dopping, who could not find any suitable gift in the shops of Ballingoole. Betty ran down to breakfast, with a radiant face, and eagerly displayed her presents to Mrs. Redmond and Belle (who had no gifts to offer her). Belle became rather red and there was a

somewhat awkward silence, as she turned over, and critically scrutinised, the gold bangle. But when her mother said, “A very *proper* attention, Betty, I only wonder that he did not think of it before. Gratitude is a rare virtue ! I was often surprised, that he made no acknowledgment of all your attention to his mother after the Major’s death. Better late than never !”

In this manner Betty’s birthday present was explained to Belle’s complete satisfaction, and she looked upon George’s gift to her cousin as a sort of indirect compliment to herself.

“Was there a letter ?” she asked suspiciously.

“No, not any,” returned Betty with a vivid blush.

“Oh, then there will be no necessity to write and thank him. I will send a

nice message from you when I write next mail."

Betty made no reply. She thought it would be better to express her gratitude through George's mother ! She wore the bangle constantly, for it was a plain, and what Mrs. Redmond termed, "every-day affair." Nevertheless, one afternoon, it attracted Dr. Moran's notice, as she sat before Miss Dopping's fire, stroking the old hound, and he smoked a Trichy cheroot. Miss Dopping's visitors might smoke (gossips said that she smoked herself ! but this was not true, but I will not deny that now and then—*only* now and then—she took a pinch of snuff). Dr. Moran had been in the army, and had seen service in India, had tended the wounded after Chillianwallah, and been several times under fire, though no one would suspect it. He was a very silent,

spare, reserved old bachelor, who had a small private fortune, and lived in Ballingoole, because he had been born there. He was eccentric like his neighbour Miss Dopping ; wore an apron at home to protect his trousers from the fire, made his own tea, mended his own shirts, spent a large portion of his income on literature and tobacco—and was ever haunted by the fear that *Maria Finny would marry him.*

“What is that thing you have on your wrist ?” he enquired. “Let me see it. It looks like an Indian bangle,” stretching out a bony brown hand.

“And so it is,” replied Betty, removing it and offering it to him as she spoke.

Dr. Moran slowly put on his glasses, and examined the ornament as critically as Belle had done.

“Do you know what this writing

means, young lady?" he asked presently, looking keenly over his spectacles.

"No, I was not even sure that it *was* writing."

"It is one word in Urdu letters."

"Can you make it out?"

"Yes—easily enough, and if the bangle was given to you by a young man, it means a great deal. This word 'Tumhara,' interpreted into English, is simply '*Thine alone.*'"

Miss Dopping—who knew the donor of the bangle—coughed sharply, and glanced at Betty, with an extraordinary amount of expression in her little beady eyes.

She even so far forgot herself as to wink, and Betty coloured to the roots of her hair. She had been a wee bit envious of all those foreign envelopes with green stamps ; not that she did not trust George with all her heart, and he had said that

he would not write. Still, there had been a curious, uneasy, unsatisfactory sensation, that, if not exactly jealousy, was jealousy's first cousin, and now, after all, her precious gold bangle and its message was worth a thousand of Belle's letters.

"So that's the way of it," exclaimed Miss Dopping after Betty had left, "and I am glad of it," for she knew George well, and he was one of her prime favourites, with his handsome face and pleasant manners. Many a time she had rapped for him, from her window, and many a visit he had paid her, and now she came to think of it, he always drew the conversation round to Betty. "I knew she wouldn't look at Ghosty Moore," she added triumphantly.

"And why not?" said Dr. Moran incredulously. "Holyroyd is only a sub-

altern in a marching regiment, with a mother and sister to support, whilst Ghosty Moore is an eldest son, and heir to a splendid property—I only hope she may never do worse.”

“ Worse—than that poor miserable anatomy of a creature ! Did you ever see him in shooting boots and long stockings ? ”

“ Never.”

“ Well then I have—and his legs look for all the world like a pair of knitting needles, stuck in two sods of turf ! Now George Holroyd has a leg that you might model.”

“ And you’d have a girl marry a man for his leg ? ” he asked with a sneer.

“ No, you old owl ! No, but for his handsome face and honourable conduct and kind heart. If Betty Redmond marries *him*, she will be a lucky girl,

and I'll give her something more than my blessing ! And so you may just keep your gibes to yourself, Paddy Moran.”

CHAPTER VII.

BELLE *VERSUS* BETTY.

“The last and greatest art, the art to blot.”

—POPE.

SUMMER had come round once more at Ballingoole, and the little place and surrounding society was much as it had been twelve months previously, save for the change at Bridgetstown—(now let to a dairyman, who churned in the drawing-room, kept ducks in the kitchen, and calves in the pleasure-ground). Belle had spent two brilliant, but barren, months at Southsea, with an elderly widow, and returned in the early autumn to Noone (and to the winter of her discontent). Betty had also been from home, and paid a visit to Roskeen,

whence she had arrived somewhat unexpectedly—for a reason only known to Ghosty Moore and herself.

Mrs. Redmond's health had long been failing ; she had entirely relinquished her airings in the bath-chair ; she took but a subordinate interest in rabbits and fruit, and had signed a truce with Mrs. Maccabe (who sent an oblation of sweet-breads by Foxy Joe). Latterly the old lady never rose till mid-day, and Betty brought her breakfast and letters to her bedside, read aloud the daily paper, and made suggestions about dinner ; whilst Robinson sat in close attendance on the invalid, and devoured choice morsels of buttered toast—for Mrs. Redmond's appetite was now a thing of the past. Belle was never astir before eleven o'clock, and, with regard to the immortal bird, was inclined to agree with the man who said,

“The more fool the worm for getting up so early.” One morning she sauntered into her mother’s room, with an unusually dissatisfied face ; it was a wet day. She had had no letters, and she was suffering from a twinge of toothache.

“How are you, mother, this morning ?” she enquired languidly.

“A little better, darling ; and how are you ?”

“Oh, I’m as usual ! wishing I was dead,” walking over and staring out of the window, down which the rain was streaming in a most depressing manner—out on the big trees, that looked dim through the mist, out on the gravel drive, with its little pools of water.

“Belle, my dearest, you must not say that.”

“Why not, when it is true ?” enquired Belle with a fierceness engendered

of temper and toothache. “Mother,” she continued, now walking to the foot of the bed, and clutching the rail in her hands, and speaking through her set teeth, “*can’t* you see that this life is killing me by inches? It’s all very well for Betty, who has never known any other; she likes the country, and dogs, and horses, and long walks—she even likes the common people and the rain! She has never had an admirer. She is not like me—you know what I have been accustomed to, what my life was, and what *this* is. If I only had the courage, I would drown myself in the canal—I swear I would.”

“Belle!” expostulated her mother.

“Could you not give up Noone, and let it, in spite of that brute, old Brian, and go away and take lodgings for the winter at Brighton or Southsea; at least, we should

see something out of our windows, instead of this eternal grass and fir-trees ? We could live on very little ; we might get a hamper from here every week. Betty could stay with old Sally."

Mrs. Redmond shook her head sadly ; she knew that she was very ill, that it was more than doubtful if she would ever pass the gates of Noone again—save in her coffin.

"If we don't get away from this hateful hole," continued Belle, looking fixedly at her mother, with a white face and gleaming eyes, "I shall do something desperate—I know I shall, and I warn you that I shall."

So saying she snatched the *Irish Times* off the bed, and swept out of the room.

Mrs. Redmond sank back feebly among her pillows, and a good many unusual tears trickled down her poor, faded cheeks.

What more could she do for Belle ? Had she not always done her best for her imprudent, impetuous child ?

All through that weary, wet day, she was unusually silent and depressed, and heaved many a long sigh at short intervals. The very next morning, in sorting out the contents of the post bag, she discovered a letter from India, addressed to herself, in Mr. Holroyd's writing. It was not for Belle ! No, there was "Mrs. Redmond" as plain as pen could write it ; her dull eyes brightened, and her face flushed as she tore it open. Here was a proposal for Belle *at last!* But—but—what was this ?

An enclosure directed to Miss Elizabeth Redmond. The old lady's hands shook as she scanned it, and her jaw dropped, and the "rigor mortis" seemed already visible in the outlines of her once jovial

countenance. She thrust it hastily under the counterpane, as if it stung her, and slowly unfolded her own letter, which ran as follows:—

“DEAR MRS. REDMOND,—I hope you will not be surprised to receive a letter from *me*, nor to read the address of the enclosed note, nor to hear that I have been attached to your niece for some time—(yes, niece). My prospects when I was at home were so very poor that I did not feel justified in speaking to you on a subject nearest my heart, nor in asking her to bind herself to a long engagement. I have been working very hard this last year, and have passed the Higher Standard in Hindustani, in hopes of getting some staff appointment and increase of pay, and now within a week, my fortunes have taken a turn for the better.

My uncle, who has discovered my impoverished state, has made me an allowance of five hundred a year, and begged that I will marry. I will gladly carry out his wishes, if you will give me Betty. No doubt she could marry a wealthier man (here he was thinking of Ghosty Moore), and make what is called a far better match, but it would be impossible for any one to love her as much as *I* do. I hope you will not be startled to hear that I am asking for Betty at once. Colonel and Mrs. Calvert, very old friends of mine, are leaving London for Bombay the end of September; she could come out with them, and they would be present at our wedding soon after they had landed. I enclose Colonel Calvert's address, and if you will write to him he will make all arrangements about a passage, and is empowered to draw on my bankers. I am

afraid I am giving you very short notice —barely a month, but the Calverts' escort is a grand opportunity, and in India we do everything rapidly and suddenly. We are here to-day, and a thousand miles away next week. I am sure you will miss Betty, but if she agrees to come out to me, I know that you will gladly spare her, for I have often heard you say, that you thought India must be a paradise for young people. I do not go so far as all that, but I will do all in my power to make it a happy home for Betty. Excuse this hurried letter, I have barely time to catch the post. Kindest regards to Miss Redmond and yourself.

“Yours sincerely,

“GEORGE HOLROYD.”

When Mrs. Redmond had come to the end of this epistle, she felt dizzy for a

moment ; a rush of blood seemed to roar in her ears, the writing appeared to dance before her eyes, she laid it down, and sank back on her pillows, trembling as if she had been dealt a blow. Suddenly she heard Betty's light step, and Betty's pleasant voice on the landing outside her door, and had barely time to thrust the letter out of sight when Betty entered—she was instantly struck by the old lady's drawn and ghastly face, and said as she leant over her :

“ I am afraid you are not so well this morning. Have you had a bad night, dear ? ”

“ Yes—a terrible night—such, such awful dreams. I think I will try and take a little doze now. No, I don't want my drops, or anything, only to be quiet,” shrinking from Betty's clear, sympathetic eyes, “ if you will just draw

down the blinds, and don't let anyone disturb me till I ring—Where is Belle?"

"She is not up yet ; she has toothache, and is feeling rather low. I think it is something in the weather."

"Very likely, my dear—do not let anyone come into the room for the next hour or two, I may get a little sleep ; I will rise by and by and ring if I want Eliza ; and oh, about the dinner ! There is some cold mutton that will make a nice hash, and that, with the fresh herrings, will be ample—you need not mind a pudding," the ruling passion thrusting itself forward even under the present circumstances.

Having dispatched her visitor with a feeling of intense relief, the old lady felt that she had now ensured privacy and leisure in which to contemplate the position, and to balance the future of the two girls—which practically lay in her hands.

First of all, she slowly read and re-read George's letter ; next she examined the envelope of his enclosure.

Oh, Indian gum, for how much you have to answer !

The envelope was scarcely stuck, and came providentially (as she thought) open in her hand ! After a moment's hesitation, she drew out the letter, and devoured it greedily. It began thus abruptly :

“ I hope and believe that you have understood the reason of my long silence, my dearest ; more than a year has elapsed since that miserable July afternoon, when you and I said good-bye to one another, and only good-bye, but it had to be so. *You* knew better than anyone how poor were my prospects, and that, with my mother to support, I had hardly the means of keeping myself, much less a

wife, and to ask a girl to engage herself to a pauper, or to bring her to a life of grinding poverty in this climate, far away from all her friends, is in my opinion a very questionable phase of love. I have been working hard for you, and you alone. I have passed in the language, and am now qualified for various lucrative billets—which, alas ! are, so far, birds in the bush. Last mail, to my great surprise, I had a letter from my uncle ; he has made me a most generous allowance of five hundred a year—and with this addition to my pay, I (but I hope it will be *we*) could get along very comfortably ; and the gist of this is—will you come out and share it ? I know you cared for me last year, but that is fifteen months ago. Can you have changed in that time ? A long time —half a life-time to me. If you have, I don't know how I am to bear it. But I

trust that your answer will be *yes*. Colonel and Mrs. Calvert, who are leaving London in the *Nankin* on the 30th September, will take charge of my future wife ; they will look after you, as if you were their own sister, and we will be married in Bombay and spend our honeymoon in Cashmere. You will have a full month to prepare for your journey, which may seem a very scanty margin, but I know a girl out here, who was married and went home at a *week's* notice. Send me a wire if your answer is what it would have been last year, and I shall begin housekeeping on the spot. There is a pretty bungalow here, surrounded by a garden, which I have often ridden past and looked at, and thought how well it would do for us. In my day dreams I have seen you walking among the flowers, with a white umbrella over your head, or

making tea in the verandah—which is half shut in by *yellow* roses. I shall have a piano and a trap awaiting you, and I know of a pony that is the very thing to carry you. This is a quiet station—we have only about fifteen ladies, and there are but few dances, etc., but you will not mind that ; you can get lots of riding and tennis ; bring out a side saddle, and, if you can, a dog. I am writing in desperate haste to catch the mail, and am not saying the quarter of what I want to say. How anxiously I shall await your answer need not be told. I calculate that I ought to get a wire on Tuesday, the twenty-seventh. Good-bye, my darling Betty.

“Ever Yours,

“GEORGE HOLROYD.”

Betty's name was only once mentioned

in the letter, otherwise it would do equally well for Belle. In his haste he had not crossed his "t's," and with a little careful manipulation the name could be altered.

To which of the girls should she give it ?

Mrs. Redmond closed her eyes, and endeavoured to review the whole case thoroughly and impartially. She herself was not long for this world, it was possibly a question of a few months ; and then what would become of Belle, with her restless ways, excitable, uncertain temper, and miserably inadequate income ? She was so pretty—so dependent—so—so—spoiled. If Betty were to go to India to marry George Holroyd she would fret to death—she would break her heart ; pending which, she would give way to some of her terrible fits of pas-

sion, the very thought of which made the old lady close her eyes. Belle was sufficiently discontented *now*, and what would be her state of mind when she saw Betty—who had always been secondary to her in every way—depart with many presents, and a handsome trousseau, to India, to marry George Holroyd—a man upon whom *she* had set her heart !

Belle's temper was getting worse year by year ; each disappointment had left its mark ; how and where would it end ? There was a touch of insanity in the family ! Mrs. Redmond recalled with a shudder how she had once been taken to see her own aunt—a melancholy spectacle—creeping along by a wall, with her long, tangled black hair, hanging like a veil over her face.

Belle would possibly carry out her threat of yesterday and do something

desperate, whereas, as Mr. Holroyd's wife, in some gay Indian station, well off, well dressed, and sufficiently amused, and shifting her home perpetually, she would have everything her soul longed for—she would be happy—and Belle's happiness was now the sole aim of her own nearly worn-out existence.

To know that Belle was in a congenial sphere, and provided with ample means, and a strong, natural protector, would lift an immense load off her mind ; but Belle, the restless inmate of some cheap boarding house, discontented, embittered, and in debt, with no one to shield, or soothe her frenzies, what would be *her* end ?

With Betty it was entirely different. She was clever, bright and young. She had all her best years before her, she would be Miss Dopping's heiress—she would have plenty of lovers and friends

wherever she went—she could marry Ghosty Moore to-morrow if she chose, and even if the worst came to the worst, she was strong, self-reliant and sensible—well able to stand alone and bear the knocks of fate. Not that these knocks could hurt her, for she was a lucky girl, and a general favourite. But this was Belle's last chance (Belle, low be it whispered, was thirty-one). After an hour's cogitation, and weighing and planning, Mrs. Redmond made up her mind to give the letter to her own daughter.

“ And what about George and Betty ? ”

“ Well, Betty would never know that her cousin had taken her place ; she might be a little disappointed, all girls had their love trials. Why, look at Belle, she had had dozens of far worse affairs—and Betty would get plenty of other offers.”

And as to George Holroyd, she was

sending him a much more suitable bride —a handsome, lively, accomplished girl, who would be a credit to him anywhere —who could sing, and act, and dress and dance—and was just cut out for an officer's wife. She would despatch her with a first-rate outfit, and once actually *en route*, once landed in Bombay—George *must* marry her.

The short notice he had given, and his bare allusion to a name in the letter, were high trumps in her hand, and she meant to play a very bold game. Once Belle had started, it would be *après Belle le déluge*; she did not care what Belle's bridegroom thought of *her*. She would write and give him her very distinct reasons for this arrangement. She would say that she could not spare Betty, who was too young and inexperienced, and for whom she had other views, and that sooner than

disappoint him altogether, she had despatched her own daughter, who was far more fitted for society and to shine as his wife ; that she wanted a good husband and a good home for Belle ; for she was a dying woman, and that he must try and forgive her—if not, she would endeavour to do without his forgiveness as best she could.

“I shall pretend that the letters came by second post,” she said, as she rose and rang for hot water—and when her toilette was completed, she nerved herself for the first move in a very difficult, delicate undertaking. She took a double dose of sal-volatile, and opening her blotter, she sat down and carefully re-examined Mr. Holroyd’s love letter, and the word Betty. What was she to do with it ? A penknife would show on such thin paper ; happy thought ! a blot. It would have

one or two companions, for the epistle had apparently been written in great haste. She raised a well-laden pen, and carefully let fall a good-sized drop, on the word “Betty.”

Did this hard-hearted old woman suspect that she was blotting out the poor girl’s happiness at the same moment? When her task was complete, and the ink looked quite nice and dry, and natural, she nerved herself for her next move. She took a long sniff at her smelling-salts, and sent for Belle.

“Belle,” she said, as that young lady strolled indolently into the room. “I’ve had a letter.”

“Have you?” indifferently. “Not Madame Josephine’s bill?”

“No, no, my dear, quite the contrary, a pleasant letter from India—from Mr. Holroyd. He has written to me to say

that his prospects are much improved—and that he can afford to marry now."

Belle, who had been staring incredulously at her mother, with a rigid white face, twitching lips, and widely dilated black eyes, seized her arm in a grip of steel and said breathlessly : "To marry whom, mother, quickly—quickly?"

If Mrs. Redmond had had one lingering qualm of compunction, it was now dispelled by her daughter's overpowering agitation.

"Why—why *you*, my darling, who else?"

Belle gave a faint cry, and threw herself into her embrace, and hugged her fiercely.

"Oh mother! mother, are you quite certain—certain?" she panted hysterically.

"Here is his letter, enclosed to me (she had destroyed the envelope), if you will

only compose yourself, and read it, my darling."

Belle took it eagerly, without the smallest suspicion, and sitting down on the edge of the bed, read it over rapidly ; her shaking fingers scarcely able to steady the page before her eyes. "And to go in a month—in a month," she repeated ecstatically, springing up and beginning to dance about the room, "Oh, I can scarcely believe it, I scarcely know what I am doing ; it's too good to be true."

"Yes," thought the old lady, as she ^{on} watched her intently. Belle, for whom she had slaved and intrigued, and schemed, and slandered, and perilled her very soul, would leave her in four weeks' time, knowing that she would never see her again, and would leave her with scarcely a pang. Anything for change, anything for excitement, anything to get away from Noone !

“I can hardly realise it, mother, it is such a surprise this dismal morning. I never was so happy in my life, not even that time when I was engaged to Major Evans, and we thought he had four thousand a year ; he had a tubby figure and a red nose. You see he invites Mossoo, and I used to think he did not like him. It’s well he mentioned my treasure, for I could not have been parted from him. ‘Love me, love my dog.’ And about my trousseau ? You will give me a good one, won’t you, like a dear old mammy ?” she said, confronting her parent with sparkling eyes, “I can do the millinery myself if I have time. I have so often thought it over, and made lists in my mind, and I know exactly what I want—for it has always been the dream of my life to go to India. I shall want a saddle and habit, at least four ball-dresses,

and a ruby velvet dinner dress, mammy darling, I *must* have that, and your old rose point, and sable tails, and the diamond brooch that was your grandmother's. You know you won't be going out, once you have have got *me* off your hands, and I shall want tea-gowns, and tailor-made dresses, and dozens of boots and shoes—and only a month!" and she paused in her walk, and gesticulated with her arms, like a figure in a ballet.

"Yes, only a month," echoed her mother, sadly.

"He is very nice and very good-looking, isn't he?" she continued. "I shall not be ashamed when I am asked to point out my husband."

"No," assented her parent, absently.

"I had always an idea that he liked me, although he *was* so self-contained. Those are the sort of men who have

deepest feelings. He was terribly cut up the day he went away, but he was very reserved, and never said anything straight out. He seems in a great hurry *now*," and she laughed triumphantly. "Does he not? There's the telegram," glancing at the letter, "I shall send it off sharp, and put the poor fellow out of his suspense. Oh! isn't he fond of me? The telegram will cost a good deal; give me your purse, dear, and I'll send Betty up the town. I wonder what Betty will say?"

Yes, indeed, what would Betty say?

"I'll go this moment and tell her," she rattled on, with brilliant eyes and heightened colour, and she quitted the room with a buoyant step, and ran down-stairs, leaving her mother seated in her arm-chair, with a bowed head, and a heavy heart.

How would Betty bear the blow ?
And what a pretty creature Belle was,
when in good spirits ; how easily elated,
or cast down.

If it had been Belle who was to stay
behind, and Betty that had been going ?
she dared not allow her mind to dwell
on that awful alternative. "Yes, yes,"
she muttered, as she rose and straightened
her cap at the glass, and surveyed
her own anxious white face. "A
mother's first duty is to her own flesh
and blood, and my conscience tells me
that I have done mine."

Mrs. Redmond's conscience !

CHAPTER VIII.

“YES, COMING.”

“To bear is to conquer our fate.”

—CAMPBELL.

BETTY had been out in the garden, gathering a harvest of flowers, whilst her three companions raced one another round the gravel walks, or rollicked among the cabbages, and she had now returned with an armful of roses, carnations and geraniums, to where all the empty vases in the house were paraded on the study table, awaiting her attention. They were soon filled from the pile of flowers. Betty had dainty, tasteful fingers, and knew how to apply a bud here and to insert a bit of fern there. She took up a late yellow rose quite tenderly, and

gave it the honour of a glass to itself, and set it off with one or two pretty shaded leaves. Had George her rose still ? The one she had pulled from the old Cloth of Gold tree, now so many months ago. He had said a year, and a year had elapsed ; it was a year and two months since that summer afternoon, when, as she came in from picking strawberries she found him waiting for her at the end of the long walk. Oh, and her heart beat quickly at the thought, if she had only seen him standing there, when she opened the garden gate to-day ! Not that she doubted him for one second ; no, she turned her bangle on her arm, and told herself she would trust him, and wait for him, if she lived for fifty years.

“ Betty, Betty, Betty,” screamed Belle, coming dashing through the drawing-room, like a whirlwind. “ Where are

you ? News, news, and such news," embracing her and hugging her till she was almost suffocated. " Do put down those wretched flowers, and listen to what I am going to tell you. Something so very nice," she added with her usual rapid utterance.

Betty stuck a piece of geranium in a glass, and turned to her cousin with an expectant smile.

" Mother has had a letter from George Holroyd."

Here Betty became rather white.

" It came by the second post ; his uncle has made him an allowance, and he can afford to marry *now*. He has friends going to India next month, and so he has written home for — guess who ?" pushing her cousin away playfully with both hands and looking at her with a pair of brilliant, excited eyes.

Betty gazed back at her with a stare of awful suspense, and almost held her breath.

"For *me!*!" cried Belle, and she broke into a hysterical peal of laughter. Betty felt as if her heart had stopped. Her senses seemed to be suddenly benumbed ; there was a dimness over her eyes. "Isn't it splendid ?" continued Belle exultantly, still holding her cousin by the wrists. "Am I not a lucky girl ? Oh, what a change in one's life a little bit of paper and a few strokes can make"—(Yes, poor Betty, what a change indeed !)

"And is it quite certain—are you sure ?" she stammered with a curious catching of her breath.

"As sure as I am standing here, my dear child ! Here's his letter, you may read it if you like !"

"Oh, no ! no !" averting her face

with a kind of shuddering sigh. Belle in her innocence was turning the knife in the wound.

“Why, Bet ! What’s this, are you not glad ? Bet, don’t be silly, you won’t miss me so *very* much, you have plenty of friends, and perhaps, if you are good, I shall send for you some day to come out and live with us. Eh—why don’t you speak ? I thought you would have been delighted !”

“It is all so sudden,” faltered the domestic martyr in a strange voice, “and—and of course,” turning her white face bravely on her cousin, “I am glad you are so happy,” but she might have been a different girl, so changed was she.

“Then look glad, my dear ! and kiss me, my Queen Elizabeth. My ! how icy cold you are this broiling afternoon, a walk will warm you.”

Belle was far too pre-occupied with her own happiness to take serious notice of her cousin's deadly pallor.

“I want you to go into town on an errand for me at once. I have so much to do, and think of, and so very little time. I feel completely bewildered. First of all, I must write to those friends of George's by this post on account of taking my passage. *He* pays for it; is he not generous? And I am to send him a wire. Look here, do you think this will do?” producing a bit of paper on which was pencilled :

“George Holroyd, Mangobad, India.
Yes, coming.”

“Six words at four shillings and six-pence a word, no need to put who it is from. *He* knows,” and she laughed triumphantly. “It will come to one pound seven; here is the family purse;

will you send it at once, and write it on the proper office form?"

"Yes," responded Betty with an effort, her throat felt so hard and dry.

"Now don't be so dull and grumpy, Bet! Do you think distance will make any difference to me? Do you think I shall ever forget you? I shall miss you frightfully. Who will bring me my tea, spell my notes, and help me to do up my dresses, and pack my clothes? When you are up the street you might run into Dooley's and tell them they are not to do a stitch of plain work for any one but me for the next month. I will go in to-morrow and speak to them myself."

"Very well," said her listener mechanically.

"Now I must run and write to these Calvert people, and to lots of others, and give them ample time to forward 'de-

sirable wedding presents. To intimate friends I shall send round a list of what I require. I hope Miss Dopping will give me something good, *you* might suggest a handsome dressing bag—fitted, of course.”

“And won’t you write to Mrs. Malone ? ”

“Not I,” scornfully. “She can wait. No doubt she has had an inkling of this all along, and that was why she was always so very cool to me. *You* are her favourite, Betty ; only for supporting her and Cuckoo, and her good-for-nothing son, poor George would have married me a year ago. I believe he made them over every penny of his private means ; however, they have seen the last of *our* money.”

Betty noted the plural, and how glibly it came tripping off the bride-elect’s lips.

“ Well, I must fly, or the post will be going without my despatches. How wild Annie Carr will be ! I shall write to her at once. I shall write to tell her that I am going to marry a handsome, rich young officer, who adores me, and is counting the very seconds till I join him in India ! Poor Annie, her day is over. I feel as if my sun were just rising,” and she passed into the hall singing.

Who can picture Betty—let them picture her, as she stood alone in the middle of the room, with pale dry lips, and a face like marble. Suddenly she sat down, and laid her arms on the table, and leant her throbbing head on them. All she wanted was time to think, to pull herself together, to try and understand what it meant ; no tear trickled down her face—a face miserable and quivering with anguish. What did

it all mean? What *did* it mean? It meant that George Holroyd, "Gentleman George" as Fred Moore said he was called, her *preux chevalier*, her model of all that was unselfish, and noble, and manly, had proved to be a very poor specimen of chivalry after all. He had merely been amusing himself with her, an ignorant, simple-minded little country chit! It was true that he had not told his love in so many words, his proposal at the garden gate had been a parable, but had that bangle no meaning? Nor a little bunch of forget-me-nots on a Christmas card, nor the kiss he had imprinted on her hand, nor the look in his eyes when they had parted? Had not irrepressible, chattering Cuckoo, plainly informed her that she was sure George worshipped the ground she stood on, and although she had feebly silenced her,

Cuckoo had persisted in declaring that he had removed her photograph from the Bridgetstown album ; and—and—and it all meant *nothing*. She was only a stupid, silly little country girl, and he had been in love with her cousin all along. It was to her he wrote constantly, she had evidently expected this summons to join him. Pretty, fascinating, well-dressed Belle ! and yet how often had he quitted Belle to speak to her ? To dwell on these cherished memories was folly now ; he was going to marry Belle, and she must stifle her feelings and seem *glad*. Her brief dream of happiness was over, was gone for ever ; before her stretched the old monotonous existence, with nothing but a blank, hopeless future. All the light had gone out of her life—quenched in a moment by a careless hand. Suddenly she heard

Belle's step approaching, and what a light and happy contrast, to her usual dragging heavy gait.

“What!” she cried, “not gone yet! Oh, do hurry and send off the telegram. George said he would expect it so anxiously, and moments to *you* are hours to him! I want you to get me five shillings' worth of stamps. How queer and strange you look; certainly such sudden news *is* stunning. Here is your hat, you will do very well; come, be off.”

And she hastily escorted her to the hall door, and saw her down the avenue, accompanied by the three delighted dogs (Mossoo preferred the fire, and the other dogs preferred his room to his company). As Betty walked along, smiling and nodding to many acquaintances—for it had been market day—she was by no means a bad imitation of the Spartan boy and fox.

She was suffering her first keen agonising grief, and wore a white but cheerful countenance. Oh ! what would she not give to be able to run away and hide herself in the woods, and there alone have it out with this stabbing pain that seemed to be tearing at her very heart-strings. She wended her way to the post office, and wrote out Belle's message on a telegram form. Strange fate ! that hers should be the hand to extinguish her own best hopes !

Miss Bolland, the post-mistress and Ballingoole daily news, of which Maria Finny was the supplement, observed more than most people, and noticed how pale Betty was, and how her hand shook as she guided the pen, and remarked upon it, with her usual uncompromising frankness.

“It’s the change in the weather,”

replied the girl mendaciously. “This close weather is trying, and I am sure there is thunder in the air.”

“Dear me, do you say so! I’m that nervous in a thunderstorm, on account of the telegraph wires. Well, miss, you do look poorly, I must say.”

“A telegram to *India*,” as Betty handed it to her; “we never sent one there before.

‘George Holroyd, Mangobad, India,
Yes, coming.’”

Now reading it aloud with inexpressibleunction.

“From *you*, Miss Betty?” with a quick glance.

“Oh no, but it is of no consequence whom it is from. It need not be wired. *He* knows.”

“Yes—but I must know, too,” returned

Jane Bolland rather sharply, “otherwise I can’t send it.”

“Miss Redmond sends it,” said Betty quietly.

“Oh, indeed. So I was thinking ; yes, coming to Mr. Holroyd. Oh, of course. It will be one pound seven shillings. Thank you, miss, it shall be despatched at once. I quite understand its importance. *Good evening.*”

In less than five minutes, Jane had darted out with a shawl over her head, to impart the great news to Mrs. Maccabe—who lived next door but one—and before the shops were closed, all Ballin-goole was in possession of the intelligence, that Miss Redmond was going to India to be married to Mr. Holroyd—and no one was the least surprised, except Miss Dopping and Betty.

CHAPTER IX.

“ FOXY JOE TELLS MORE TALES,
AND ONE FALSEHOOD.”

“These two hated with a hate
Found only on the Stage.”
—BYRON.

“THERE goes old Sally, hot foot out to
Noone to hear the news and to set them
all by the ears !”

In this agreeable manner did Maria
Finny notify the fact to her mother ;
Maria, who was cautiously peering over
the blind, just merely showing the top
of her grey head, and her grey eyebrows
—not staring out with a bold and un-
daunted gaze, like her opposite neighbour.

“There she goes,” she repeated, “and
half the beggars in the town after her.”

For once Miss Finny’s surmise was

correct. Miss Dopping had hardly been able to credit her senses when she was told of Belle's engagement. She must have it from the fountain-head, she must hear it from the bride-elect's own lips.

With her, impulse meant action, and at the unusual hour of eleven o'clock in the morning she had put on her bonnet and shawl, and seized her umbrella, and posted out to cross-examine the Redmonds, root and branch. On the canal bridge just beyond the town, she encountered Belle herself—also afoot at an unusually early hour—walking into Ballingoole with a brisk step and beaming face, to give orders about her outfit, to post some glowing letters, and to receive the congratulations of the community. With present contentment in her heart, re-assured vanity whispering in her ear, and (as she firmly believed) a delightful

future before her, everything seemed *couleur de rose*; even Ballingoole, hated Ballingoole, looked quite pretty, as it sloped towards the canal, showing a series of sunny old gardens, brilliant with gay August flowers, their crumbling grey walls almost hidden by a wealth of autumn fruit. Even detestable old Sally Dopping, as she paused on the top of the high “fly” bridge, and leant on her redoubtable umbrella, looked less like a malevolent old witch, and more like a generous, good fairy, who would bring a valuable wedding present in her hand ! And as to the Mahons, Finnys, Macabes, she really felt quite fond of them —now that she was going to leave them —and she had not the smallest doubt in her own mind, that they would all sincerely regret her departure.

But Belle, could she but see herself as

others saw her, was not popular in the neighbourhood.

The Irish are quick to discern character, and are, when they choose, incisive and severe critics. Belle was judged to be a smart, dashing young woman, but hot-tempered and stingy, and had never been known to give a copper to any one—not even the poor “dark” man by the post office steps. “She is not fit to open the door to Miss Betty. She will be as fat as her mother yet, and every bit as mane !” Such was the village verdict.

“Well, Miss Dopping,” she exclaimed, “you are out early. I suppose you have heard my news ?”

“So then it *is* you !” was the rather ungracious reply.

“Of course,” with a smile of triumphant complacency, “and what do you say to it ?”

“Umph—say to it ; I say better late than never !”

“Oh,” with an angry laugh, but determined not to lose her temper, “come now, Miss Dopping, you would not have said that if it had been Betty !”

“No—how could I ? And she only nineteen ? Look here, Isabella, you know I never mince my words, do I ? I always thought it *was* Betty. I say so plainly to your face, and I suppose I must be dropping into my second childhood, for I declare I certainly thought by the looks of that young fellow, that he was desperately in love with her, and it seemed to me, when I’d seen them riding together side by side, so handsome and so happy, that the Lord made them for one another ! Will you swear to me here on the top of Ballingoole Bridge,

that there has been no bamboozling about letters, and no trickery of any kind?"

Such an insinuation was more than the expectant bride-elect could tamely bear—even from rich Miss Dopping.

"I swear to you that there has not," returned Belle, glaring at her with her face and eyes in flame, and literally trembling with fury.

"You wicked old woman; you may see his letters if you like? Of course I know that you are horribly annoyed to find that anyone could prefer *me* to Betty; it's lucky for me that there are not many Miss Doppings in the world! Thank goodness, I have plenty of friends, and always been a favourite wherever I have been."

"Oh, of course," agreed the old lady drily, "we all know that your mother

reared an angel ; but Betty has no mother, and none to put in a word for her but me. I have asked you a plain question privately, and you have given me my answer, and there is an end of it.”

“And are you satisfied, because *that* is so very important ?” sneered Belle, with an expression on her face that rendered it downright ugly.

“Well, I am satisfied that you are telling me the truth,” she returned evasively ; “and since it is so, you are getting a very good match, for a good son will be a good husband. I wish you joy and I need detain you no longer. I’ll just go on to Noone, since I *am* this far.”

Belle, whose feathers had been considerably ruffled by this encounter, found her good spirits and self-approval return, as she visited in turn the post office, the

Finnys and the Dooleys. She was the heroine of the hour, and enjoyed her brief triumph. The Dooleys, who kept a draper's shop and the dressmakers' establishment, and who had a keen eye to future orders, although they had had stormy passages with Belle (but who had not?) laid on congratulations and flattery, so to speak, with a trowel, and she was figuratively plastered over with compliments by the time she arrived at Mrs. Maccabe's with a small domestic order.

“And so they tell me you're going to the Indes, miss?” said the widow as she carefully pared and trimmed four loin chops, operating on them quite in a fashion after Mrs. Redmond's own heart. “Ye'll like that, I suppose?”

“Yes, I have all my life longed to go to India.”

“I hear them’s very ondacent people out there and wears next to no clothes ! And they don’t ate no mate in them countries, I am told, but *that* will suit you finely ! You won’t have no butcher’s bill, but will be living on bread and rice. Faix,” with a wheezy laugh, “you are not like my cat, that died of an Ash-Wednesday, because he could not face the Lent ! Well, miss, I wish yourself and the gentleman every luck, and that ye may live long, and die happy.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Maccabe. I think we shall suit one another,” returned Belle, complacently.

“I’m glad it wasn’t Miss Betty he sent for ; we could not spare *her* just yet, though no doubt she will be going from us some of these days, too, and it will be a lucky man that takes her. Get

out of that, Joey," to Foxy Joe ; " what are ye waitin' for ? why don't ye take them ribs up to the Glebe when ye know they dine at two o'clock."

"I was just waiting on Miss Redmond to give her joy ! You will not forget poor Joey, miss—will ye ?" And he eyed her with an expression of latent cunning.

Belle glanced at him scornfully, and made no reply.

" You will remember the hand *I* had in it, won't ye, miss ?" he repeated in a louder key.

" I don't know what you are talking about," returned Belle, haughtily, now preparing to leave the shop, which was filling fast with respectable customers.

Foxy Joe, who, I am sorry to say, had already been at Nolan's, partaking of an early glass, and had imbibed what is

generally known as the “cross drop,” was not to be thus set aside.

“Sure, I am talking of all the love letters I carried for you, miss,” he answered in an angry scream, “when *he* was at home. Begorra, ye were a terrible young lady with the pen ! as many as four to his wan, and I was always to wait for an answer ; bedad, *he* was not in the same hurry ! And ye never give me a copper, not a hate but an old neck-tie, and promises—Faix !—ye must make it up to me *now*.”

Here a violent clout from Mrs. McCabe’s ox tail reduced him to a whimpering silence, and then he roared out :

“And can’t ye let me alone, and what harm am I doing ye—Bridgey McCabe ?”

“How dar *ye* spake to your betters like that, ye dirty little tell-tale whelp ?”

she demanded furiously. “ I’ll have to get shut of ye, I’m thinking—body—sleeves—*and* trimmings.”

“ Never mind him,” interrupted Belle, whose voice shook with passion. “ Take no notice on *my* account, Mrs. Maccabe. He’s only a fool; no one pays any attention to his lies.”

“ Lies !” screamed Joey, “ lies am I telling ? I’m telling lies, am I ? Well, I’ll tell a good one when I go about it —*you’re a lady !*”

At this Mrs. Maccabe laid hold of her foaming, stuttering retainer, and shook him like a rat, whilst Belle, holding her head very erect, and carrying the four chops in a small basket, stalked out of the shop with all the dignity she could muster, and her face in a flame !

Poor Belle ! this world is full of disappointments, even when one’s affairs wear

a most smiling aspect ; her little triumphal expedition into town had not been quite as satisfactory as she had anticipated.

CHAPTER X.

“THE BRIDE-ELECT.”

“Was ever maid so used as I?”

—UPTON.

THE days that ensued, how busy they were, and how fast they flew. Mrs. Redmond, with a deadened conscience and an active brain, fired up into a final blaze of energy and intrigue. She drew out—although it was as agonising as extracting her teeth—a considerable amount of her savings, to pay for Belle's extravagant outfit. It was one of her few remaining pleasures to see her idol fittingly adorned, and to superintend dress rehearsals of future social triumphs.

She dashed off dozens of letters to her former friends, announcing her daughter's

approaching wedding in fitting terms ; and as Belle was apparently making an excellent match, presents followed in thick and fast. Mrs. Malone endowed her future relative with her own wedding veil. Cuckoo sent a case of scissors, Miss Dopping a looking-glass in an antique silver frame, with a bye word to Betty that "it would remind the bride of what she loved best in the world." And there were many other offerings, from a small diamond brooch to a large silver button-hook, and on the whole Belle considered that she had done remarkably well. Betty was invaluable at this period. She planned and sewed, and toiled from morning till night, and was quite feverishly busy—in constant bodily occupation was her only opiate for mental anguish. The shock of the first realisation of George's baseness, had resolved itself into a con-

tinuous ache, that would always stir and throb as long as his memory might rouse her pride ; her lover had forsaken her, and the bitterness of abandonment was in her heart. Many people remarked that she was looking thin and out of spirits, that her eyes were hollow, and her laugh was rare, but attributed this—including the fair damsel herself—to Belle's approaching departure. She accompanied her radiant cousin in wild and hasty raids on Dublin shops. She folded and unfolded, tried on and altered, many of the smart gowns that came pouring in by the carrier's cart. She "hurried up" the Dooleys, and the hum of her sewing machine might be heard for hours. But late at night, whilst Belle slept soundly, and dreamt happy dreams of India, at the other side of the thin partition wall, Betty, wrapped in a white dressing-gown,

and with streaming hair, was wandering restlessly up and down, and flinging herself on her knees with clasped and outstretched hands. “He has forgotten,” she would murmur—“Oh, if *I* could but forget,” and then she would sob—repressed strangling sobs, lest the sound should penetrate to her sleeping cousin. No wonder that she looked pale and haggard, and very different from the gay and beaming Betty of a year ago !

She worked very hard, whilst restless, excitable Belle found a number of excellent reasons for doing nothing, and roamed about the house, singing snatches of songs, and waltzes, and talking incessantly of India, herself and George. “It’s a curious thing, Betty,” she remarked one day, as she lolled beside her busy companion, “that, although George was so desperately fond of me, as *you* know, he

never said anything, never even hinted at an offer, or committed himself by word or look ; and I am sure I gave him heaps of openings. Do you remember how I used to sing :

‘Si vous n’avez rien à me dire.’”

And she laughed a shameless laugh.

“I told him over and over again, that it was the dream of my life to see India, and yet he never said one syllable ; he did not think it honourable to ask a girl to share a life of poverty. No wonder they call him ‘Gentleman George,’ eh ?”

“No wonder !” echoed Betty rather faintly.

“I am so glad he likes *you*, Bet, he often said so, and always sent you messages in his letters, kind remembrances and that sort of thing. Some day you must come out and pay us a visit. I am certain you would marry well out in India,

where girls are scarce ; you have such lots of ‘go’ in you, and really your eyes and figure are not so bad. I believe George rather admired you !”

“ Tell me one thing, Belle,” said the other, shielding with her hand her poor quivering face. “ Do you love him very much ? I know he is not your first love.”

“ Pooh !” interrupted the bride-elect, “ nor my twenty-first ; I had my first love at eleven years of age, a delightful school-boy, who ruined himself in lockets and chocolates for my sake, and now at twenty-nine (though I don’t look it) I have my last, I suppose ! I don’t believe in frantic love, such as you read of in books, where girls walk about all night wringing their hands and weeping,”— Betty became scarlet—“ and where men—well, now I come to think of it—the

men don't care ! they swear they will shoot themselves, and they fall in love with the next pretty face. Love, such as poets rave about, blazes up quickly like straw, and then goes out, and leaves unpleasant ashes ; great emotions wear people down, and age them frightfully."

"If you don't believe in love, what do you believe in ?" said Betty, suddenly laying down her work.

"I believe in a presentable, gentlemanly husband, with good connections, and a full purse. I believe in gold, incense and freedom. I believe in a delightful life in India, in lots of amusement and going about, I——"

"But——" began her listener interrogatively.

"Yes, I know what you are going to say, of course I like George very much, but not so much as *he* likes me. That

is always the way ; one is saddled and bridled, and the other is booted and spurred—I infinitely prefer the latter rôle ! Look at Mrs. Malone ! Of course *she* was a fool, but what a life she led. Well, she will be a harmless mother-in-law, that's one comfort ! Only think, Bet, this day week I shall be on the high seas, and this day month I shall probably be Mrs. Holroyd, and you will no longer be Miss Betty, but Miss Redmond. I have promised mother to send a wire, so that it may appear in the papers at once. I always think it looks so well and so important, to see an announcement concluding with ‘By Telegram.’ ”

Mrs. Redmond seemed entirely oblivious of the part she had enacted in the domestic drama, and treated the engagement as if it were quite a *bonâ-fide*

affair, and had possibly brought herself to believe that it was so. She received numerous visitors, to whom she expatiated eloquently on the ancestors, and the acres, of the Holroyds, and the great match Belle was making—to which plain-spoken Miss Dopping had remarked, that it might turn out to be a *Lucifer* match yet!—and I am truly concerned to add, was disagreeably exultant to the mothers of unmarried daughters. Her conscience was now, so to speak, dead. She had assured it, in its last dying struggles, that she was merely doing evil that good might come. What was a lie? merely an intellectual evasion of a difficulty! She had lied to Belle, boldly and successfully, and were she to confess now, and repair her error, Belle would perhaps end her days in a madhouse. She had only given destiny a little push, that was all!

In spite of Dr. Moran's angry ex-postulations, Mrs. Redmond made a great effort, and accompanied her daughter to London, saw her on board the *Nankin* in the Victoria Docks, handed her over to the charge of Colonel and Mrs. Calvert, and then bade her good-bye for ever. Belle hugged her and kissed her many times, and wept herself to the very verge of hysterics, but her tears were dry, and she had smoothed her hair, and changed her hat, and was chatting merrily—long before the *Nankin* had passed Gravesend.

Her day, she told herself, was just rising, and she was resolved to make the most of it, whilst the poor old lady, rumbling back to London in a four-wheeler, and sobbing as if her heart would break, felt that her life was over—she had practically done with existence when she closed the door of Belle's cabin.

CHAPTER XI.

“THE UNEXPECTED.”

“Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate.”

THE *Nankin* was favoured with splendid weather, and palpitated eastward at the rate of fifteen knots an hour, between a cobalt blue sky and a mirror-like sea. The globe-trotting season had set in with unusual severity, and there were two hundred and fifty passengers on board, including about seventy ladies, and among these Miss Redmond was singled out as one of the most fascinating spinsters! Yes—she was already tasting the delights for which she had so long languished. Her bright dark eyes, animated manners, pretty frocks, and pretty figure, met with general

approval, and she anticipated her wedding day by displaying a goodly portion of her trousseau, and embarked on a series of vivacious flirtations.

To do her justice, they were above board, and comparatively harmless, and from the grey-haired captain to a smooth-faced sub-lieutenant she had many slaves. She changed her cavaliers almost as often as her toilettes, and yet the ladies bore her no ill-will, nor did they discourse of her in whispers, as they did of that *other* siren, who smoked cigarettes behind the wheel-house—not alone. Belle implored Mrs. Calvert in eager piteous accents not to divulge the fact that she was going out to be married to Mr. Holroyd.

“Why not, my dear? I think any girl might be proud to be engaged to George Holroyd,” protested George’s friend.

“Oh, of course, but I want to enjoy my-

self, and have a little fun before my wings are clipped. Look at those two engaged girls in charge of the Captain ! How dreadfully dull and dowdy they are ; you would not wish me to be like *them* ? ”

But if Belle was not going out to India to change her name, why were all her boxes and belongings branded I. F. H., and on one tell-tale trunk was actually painted in bold white letters “ Mrs. George Hollroyd.” Her secret was well known (the other girls took care of *that*), and she was as plainly marked “ engaged ” as any reserved railway carriage. She had soon many particular lady friends, and of admirers a great host ; with everything she had ever coveted in her wardrobe, with India before her, and nothing to do, but talk, and laugh, and dress, and flirt, Belle was, for once in her life, a thoroughly happy woman. She had nothing to wish

for—no, not even the presence of George ! He might object to her acting with Count Calincourt, and might possibly misunderstand her friendship with Mr. Beaufort, a rich M.P., who paid her immense attention, and, when they landed at Malta, had loaded her with half the contents of Borg's shop. She had a callous heart, a faultless digestion, and a torpid conscience. To her eager, volatile disposition, the act of forgetfulness was second nature, and she never cast a retrospective glance to her own detested past, and but few to Noone and its occupants ; *En avant* was her mental war-cry ! Her morning *début* on deck was a sort of triumphal procession from the companion ladder to her chair ! At least half a dozen swains were in her train. One carried her pillow, another her book, a third her fan, a fourth her

scent bottle ; the ladies, too, were deeply interested in her arrival ; they were on the *qui vive* to see what new and beautiful raiment she would wear, and she always looked as trim and smart as if she had stepped out of a bandbox. It was nothing to this appreciative, nodding, smiling circle, that she had left the cabin she shared with Mrs. Calvert, Miss Gay, and another, in a deplorable condition. Her belongings, such as brushes, combs, shoes, hair-pins, gowns, strewn broadcast, within very narrow limits. Enough for them, that the effect of her labours was excellent, and a few pretty apologies and a little bit of “butter” were ample payment in her opinion for Miss Rose Gay, who was tidying, folding, and evolving order out of chaos below.

Belle looked so pretty, and chatted so pleasantly, that she was a general

favourite. She was the mainspring of amusement, too ; she taught games, gave riddles, sang delightfully on the moonlit deck, to the accompaniment of a guitar, acted admirably, and gave readings ; got up Mrs. Jarley's waxworks, and was quite a leading spirit on board the *Nankin*. And if she was a little untidy in the cabin, and now and then made thoughtless speeches—who is perfect ?

Her dog “Mossoo” was not quite so popular, although he also entertained his fellow-travellers by walking on his head, waltzing and dying. His mistress made such a fuss about him, insisted on having him to sleep in her berth, kept up a continual commotion about his food, allowed him to lie on other people's chairs, and clipped him with other people's scissors. He was not a pleasant poodle

and took no pains to make himself agreeable. He was self-conscious, affected, and vain. He had a little brown snub nose, round reddish-brown eyes—that seemed full of wicked thoughts—and a mole on his upper lip, not concealed by his moustache, which gave him a sneering supercilious expression. He appeared to be saying: “But *you* are only human beings, I am an accomplished French poodle.” Most people like dogs, but “Mossoo” made no friends. He was despised by the ship cat, detested by the crew, and was once stigmatised by an angry steward as “a lazy good-for-nothing brute, who slept all day and ate like a *passenger*.” As the voyage wore on, Miss Redmond’s popularity became a little threadbare. She talked too much, and, in her eager desire to cater for listeners, she sometimes said things that were best

omitted, made daring little jokes at the expense of other ladies, related amusing anecdotes that were for the benefit of the cabin—not the deck. Some of the men (seasoned old Indians), who were acquainted with George Holroyd, made polite advances to his bewitching little black-eyed bride—and were smilingly repulsed when they spoke of him. She merely laughed, and shrugged her shoulders, carelessly, and changed the subject ; and subsequently they shrugged *their* shoulders, and wondered what a smart fellow like Holroyd, such a popular chap, and good all round, could see in that chattering, flighty, over-dressed doll.

Mrs. Calvert (Belle's chaperon) was a slight, refined, rather worn-looking woman, who had left four young children at home, and was following her husband's fortunes, whilst her sister, Miss Gay, ac-

companied her—possibly in quest of her own. She was plain, but so neat and smart that she was almost pretty ; clever, bright, and amiable—and both sisters were unmistakably ladies in every sense of the word. These two, and another, shared Belle's cabin. It was not as if *she* shared theirs, for the whole of that restricted apartment was pervaded by her belongings, from gloves and shoes to “Mossoo's” coat, collar and bones. In such narrow quarters, one is not long in discovering the true character of one's fellow-passenger ; there is no better opportunity for mutual insight, and many a lasting feud or friendship has been born in a four-berthed cabin ! Belle began well : she was affectionate to Mrs. Calvert and her sister (and agreeable to Miss Cox—who made up the quartette), insisting on Miss Gay calling her by her

Christian name, and effusive with offers of scent, face lotions, and various loans of small articles, eager to do every one's hair, eager to alter people's hats—in fact most anxious to ingratiate herself—and she succeeded. She kissed Mrs. Calvert—in spite of that lady—and wound her arm round Miss Gay's waist or leant upon her as they paced the deck in the twilight. But by and by, capricious Belle found “other fish to fry.” Her head was a little turned by her unusual social success ; she became less demonstrative in her affection, and alas ! alas ! her temper began to be seen ! One day it appeared in great force in the cabin, as they were dressing for dinner, all somewhat hot and hurried.

“Did you see that horrid Mr. Noakes throwing ‘Mossoo’ out of his chair,” she said, “as if the poor dog was doing

any harm ? Mr. Noakes is a detestable cad ! A regular 'Arry.' ”

“ He is a friend of mine,” said Miss Cox stiffly, “ and I beg you not to call him names.”

“ Stuff,” exclaimed Belle, with the light of battle on her face, “ I can’t help your having cads for friends, this is a free ship ! I shall say what I please, I shall say *more*—birds of a feather flock together.”

“ You shall not say what you please to *me*,” returned the other, not knowing with whom she had to cope, nor that it was a fatal mistake to argue with Miss Redmond ; but argue she did, and she had the best of the dispute, whilst Mrs. Calvert and her sister were the miserable witnesses to a quarrel that would have disgraced the Kilkenny cats ! Miss Redmond, boiling over with ungovernable fury, gave her too ready

opponent a smart slap on the face with the back of a hair brush, a slap that left a *mark*—a mark that was shown to the Captain—and after this, there was a somewhat constrained silence. Belle held her head high, and pretended that she did not care. Nor did she notice, later in the evening, how some of the ladies whispered and looked. This scene was the precursor of several of a similar type ; there were hot words, though no blows, in other places, and she missed her mother desperately on these occasions—her mother who had always officiated as her buffer and shield. These cruel people received her hysterical apologies so very, *very* coldly. By the time that Bombay lighthouse was in view, Belle's evanescent popularity had almost wholly disappeared. What would she have said, had she peeped over the shoulder of one of her

former admirers, and seen the letter he was writing for the mail.

“We have lots of girls on board, some going out to be married, some on promotion, some pretty, some plain. A Miss Redmond takes the cake, as far as looks and frocks go. She plays the guitar and sings and acts and is coming out for amusement *only*, and means to go far. She has a truly tropical temper, and has embroiled herself with several of her sex, and for all her bright eyes and many fascinations, I heartily pity the poor devil who is to marry her.”

Yes, Belle’s temper had as usual been her social bane, and most of the ladies who were her fellow-passengers (forgetting all her pretty time-killing efforts) spoke of her subsequently in their several circles as “that awful creature we came out with on board the *Nankin*.” Mrs.

Calvert and her sister were silent and circumspect, and by an immense outlay of tact and forbearance managed to keep an unbroken peace, but they lived in a state of repressed nervous excitement, and more than once were appealed to, and almost forced into a quarrel either with her or Miss Cox. Mrs. Calvert marvelled at what possessed George Holroyd to marry this shallow, restless, fiery little person, who rarely named him, and then with as much emotion as if she were speaking of her washerwoman.

One afternoon, when she and her sister were leaning against the bulwarks watching the deep green water, and sheets of lace-like foam that fell away from the steamer's bows, they began to discuss their charge with bated breath.

“I cannot imagine what has happened to George Holroyd,” exclaimed Mrs. Calvert.

“How can he call her a simple little country girl ?” glancing across at Belle.

“Yes,” returned her sister, “he must be very blindly in love, if he supposes her to be but nineteen.”

“She looks quite ten years older—nearly as old as I am,” said Mrs. Calvert.

“And so she is,” replied Miss Gay. “I heard her talking of being at Ascot on a Cup day, and some one said, ‘Why *that* horse ran eleven years ago.’ She seemed so vexed, and said that she was taken by her mother when she was quite a little girl in short petticoats.”

“I shall be truly thankful when this voyage is over ! We have had fine weather certainly, but what storms—my nerves, I know, have all gone to pieces, but sometimes, Rosie, I tremble all over !”

“Now that she and Miss Cox don’t

speak it is better,” said her sister consolingly.

“But Miss Cox’s friends have all cut her, and so have several people. Oh ! I little knew what I was undertaking,” rejoined Mrs. Calvert with a groan.

“I wonder whether Mr. Holroyd knows what he is undertaking ?”

“Poor fellow ! I am sure he has no suspicion of her temper—I wish you had seen the letter he wrote to me about his pretty inexperienced young bride.”

“Pretty, yes ; inexperienced, no ; young, no.”

“He has married her for herself alone. She has not a fraction ; he actually paid for her passage. Her face is her sole fortune.”

“If he could but see her in her true colours, I am sure he would thankfully furnish her with a return ticket,” said Miss Gay briskly—“and there’s the first

bell, let us hurry down and get dressed before she appears upon the scene, for you know, we won't get *near* the glass!"

The *Nankin* arrived in Bombay a few hours earlier than she was expected, and the steam launch which brought off the company's agent, various eager husbands, some servants to welcome old masters, and all the letters—did not bring George Holroyd.

The Calverts and their fair charge had been installed for some hours at Watson's Hotel before he made his appearance, and during that time, although the bride-elect showed no anxiety, Mrs. Calvert was a prey to many misgivings.

Could he have heard of her quarrels and flirtations? Could he have changed his mind at the eleventh hour?

Belle, attired in a fresh and becoming toilette, was seated in the big verandah, surrounded by hopeful hawkers, and the

cynosure of many admiring eyes. Some of her fellow-passengers were also sitting, or standing about, and there was a whisper among them, that possibly Miss Redmond's bridegroom had cried off. They were all rather curious to see what manner of man he was, and his non-appearance occasioned some disappointment, and more excitement, now that an element of uncertainty was imported into the situation. But there was not the shadow of a cloud in Miss Redmond's face, as she turned over jewellery and silver articles with childish delight, and excitedly bargained for rugs and phool-carries for her future drawing-room. Hearing a sudden exclamation of joy and relief from Mrs. Calvert, she raised her eyes, and saw George ascending the stairs, and with a bound across a case of rings, and three silver sugar-bowls, she fluttered out to meet him.

He was greatly altered, he looked worn, thin, and haggard ; and he seemed to have aged ten years ; his neatly-fitting tight suit hung loosely on him, and his hands were as emaciated as if he had just recovered from a long illness.

He explained, when the first greetings were over with Belle and the Calverts, that his train had broken down on the Ghauts, entailing a delay of twelve hours, and after a short parley, Belle, who was not the least bashful, placed her arm frankly within his, and led him away through a staring circle, into the privacy of the ladies' sitting-room,—which happened to be empty.

“ Well, George,” she exclaimed, “ here I am you see,” and she put her hand on his shoulder, and gazed smilingly into his face.

Poor George, he had been nerving him-

self for this terrible interview for days, and the reality proved more than the anticipation.

“Yes, here you are, I see,” and he kissed her. “I hope you have had a good passage?”

“Delightful, but what dreadfully short notice you gave me, and”—as if it had only just struck her—“how desperately ill you are looking. Were you afraid that I would not come?”

“I have had a very bad go of fever,” he answered evasively. “And nothing knocks one over so quickly. I shall soon be all right.”

“And how do you think *I* am looking?” she enquired coquettishly.

“Prettier than ever,” he replied with promptitude, as he gazed dispassionately at his future wife—the wife that fate and Mrs. Redmond had sent him. She was

really remarkably handsome, and appeared to be in the highest spirits, and utterly unconscious of her mother's baseness.

“I am charmed with India so far!” she said, “with the funny Parsees with their coal-scuttle hats, and the brown natives, the warm atmosphere, the big buildings, the Portuguese waiters, the hotel and the hawkers, in fact, with everything.”

“I am very glad that India has made a good impression on you at first sight, and I hope you may never have any occasion to change your mind. I have got everything ready for you at Mangobad, and I think you will like your future home.”

“I am certain I shall. Oh, George, you don't know how pleased I was to get your letter. How sly you were all along. I never could be *quite* sure that

you cared for me, and I was very miserable ; that dreadful life at Noone was killing me by inches. Here we have plenty of sun, and life and colour, and society and constant change. How happy we shall be ! ”

“ I hope so, with all my heart,” he answered gravely.

“ But how quiet and silent and solemn you are ; what has happened to you ? Has India this effect on people ? You look like a death’s head.”

“ You must not mind me. I have not yet got over the fever ; it takes me some time to shake off. You must be gay enough for both of us,” with a rather dreary smile. “ And now tell me, how did you leave them all at home. I mean your mother—and—and—Betty,” turning away so that she could not see his face.

“ Mother saw me off herself, although

she has been ailing a good deal, latterly ; she will miss me very much, but she will have Betty."

" But not for long," rather sharply.

" Well, I don't know ; if you mean about Ghosty Moore, of course they like one another, and the Moores are fond of Betty, but nothing is positively settled as *yet*. I would never have got off without her, never have been ready in time ; you really owe her a debt of gratitude, she worked almost day and night, and packed my boxes, and altered my dresses, and thought of every detail down to fans and oranges for the Red Sea. I shall miss her terribly. If there is any hitch about her marrying Ghosty Moore, we must have her out on a visit by and by, what do you think ?"

George became very white, and made no reply.

“I know you like her, for you have often said so, and she would not be with us very long. She would be sure to marry, though of late she has completely lost her looks, whether it was from a cold, or fretting at parting with me, or worrying herself about Ghosty, I cannot say, but she is really growing quite plain. Shall we have her out if the match does not come off ?”

“No. What puts her into your head just now ? You have scarcely arrived in India yourself.”

“‘No,’ George, dear ; what are you saying ? ‘No,’ to me already ?”

“I think married people are best by themselves. You know the saying, ‘Two are company, etc.’”

“How can you be so ridiculous ; as if poor Betty would be in the way any more than she was at Noone !”

“At any rate, your mother could not spare her—even if there was no other reason.”

“That is true, and I am certain Augustus Moore could not spare her either. Betty will be old Sally Dopping’s heiress, and a great catch. Now let us go back to the others, I hate people to suppose that we are billing and cooing, it’s so stupid. By the way, those two friends of yours, Mrs. Calvert and her sister, are a pair of detestable cats. I can’t bear them, and I know they can’t bear *me*. I shall be so glad when I am formally handed over to *you*. Come along now, they are making tea in the verandah, let us join the rest of the company,” to which request George agreed with rather suspicious alacrity. That interview was over, and he had played his part pretty well. So he said

to himself, as he wiped his pale forehead, and followed his unsuspecting fiancée out of the room. Sitting opposite to Belle, as she sipped her tea, and chattered volubly, he realised what a very pretty woman she was, especially when he contrasted her with various faded matrons, who were waiting for the next home-ward-bound steamer. She had all the advantages of taste, and dress, and freshness.

She was "handsome, agreeable, and good-tempered," he assured himself, and he was doing what was right in his own eyes—and it might have been worse. Poor George !

CHAPTER XII.

“ ‘ SHE ’ UNDERSTANDS ME.”

GEORGE HOLROYD’s leave to England had borne but faint resemblance to the plan he had sketched out, as he steamed home-wards, with his mind full of anticipa-tions of sport, and amusement, and his pockets full of money. It is true that he had had some capital hunting (thanks to Clancy’s grey, who was now in a racing stable), but his shooting and fish-ing projects, his visits to race-courses, his trip on the Continent, were still so many castles in the air. He was return-ing all but penniless, minus new clothes, new saddlery, a new battery of guns—minus his money, and, above all, minus

his heart. What had he to show for his eight months’ tour to Europe ? One badly executed photograph—a cheap little silver brooch, and a withered flower, but these he valued beyond all price !

On the passage out, he was a dull enough companion, and took a very subordinate interest in smoking concerts, whist, or theatricals, and no interest whatever in various well-favoured young ladies ; no, he paced the deck in solitude, revolving plans that might tend to his getting his foot upon the ladder that leads to good things and lofty positions, *i.e.*, “the staff.” He must study the language in earnest, and pass the Higher Standard, so as to be eligible for an appointment that would give him an increase of pay, and enable him to make a home that would not be quite unworthy of Betty.

At Port Said he received a cheerful epistle from Belle ; she wrote a good hand, and, like many people who are not brilliantly intellectual, an excellent letter, if her orthography was not always above suspicion. She had the knack of giving interesting items of news in a short space, but among her whole budget there was not a word about her cousin—truly the play of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. After a rough passage through the south-west monsoon, Mr. Holroyd arrived in Bombay, and set out for a four days' railway journey up the country. Once the Ghauts are crossed, there is but little to enliven the landscape, through the low scrub jungle of the Central Provinces, through large tracts of grain, varied by a few mosques and tombs, past fortified mud villages, herds of lean cattle, and whitewashed

railway stations, where the same bill of fare remains unchanged from year’s end to year’s end—tough beefsteak and fiery curry !

At last, in the dim light of early morning, George arrived at his destination, the insignificant cantonment of Mangobad. His brother officers welcomed him warmly, listened eagerly to all his news, and enquired about his new guns, and mentioned a couple of smart racing ponies that they had, so to speak, marked down for him !

“No doubt they would suit me down to the ground if I could afford them,” he answered in reply to a suggestion that he ought to wire and secure them at once. “But I can’t afford anything better than a barrack tat. It’s a fact,” looking frankly round his comrades who were assembled in the billiard-room, after

mess. "I am stone broke ; I have lost a lot of money. I am as poor as Job."

Captain La Touche, a stout dapper-looking man, his special friend, paused as he was about to light a cigarette, and exclaimed :

"Now then, young Holroyd, so you would go to Monaco !"

"Not I! I never went near the place. I lost the money in an investment, in—in short, in—in family—matters."

"Well, I am truly sorry to hear it," said his comrade, coming over and taking a seat beside him, "but you have three nags here and a good kit, and you can scrape along with very little besides your pay, as long"—and here he eyed him sharply—"as you don't think of getting married."

"I suppose you know that Jones of the other battalion is going to commit

matrimony,” said George, by way of changing the conversation.

“Going to be married, is he ?” growled a grizzled major, “and serves him right. The Lord be praised, that’s a folly of which I have never been guilty.”

“Nor I,” added Captain La Touche, who was a bachelor, and proud of his estate.

“Don’t shout till you are out of the wood,” returned George impressively.

“Why not?—I am practically out of the wood ! There is no fear of me—why I’ve actually been in action with a would-be father-in-law, and came out scatheless.”

“How—you never confessed this before ?”

“Oh, it was at Southsea some time ago, when I was quite pretty and slender and active. One night I danced seven or

eight times with an uncommonly nice girl: the next morning her father waited on me—a blood-thirsty looking old brigand—and demanded my intentions."

"‘My intentions, sir,’ I said, ‘were to give your daughter a very pleasant evening’ (he enacted the part), I placed my hand on my heart, and bowing most profoundly, said, ‘And I flatter myself that I succeeded.’ I suppose there is no hope for Jones—no choking him off?”

“No,” returned another man, “I know Jones well; you might as well try to choke a pig with melted butter.”

“He won’t believe that love is the wine of life, and marriage the headache in the morning,” snarled the Major.

“Jones was always a fool,” remarked a third.

This anti-matrimonial discussion made George rather uncomfortable; he had

been among these ribald scoffers himself, but that was in old days—and before he knew Betty.

Captain La Touche was senior captain in the Royal Musketeers, and George's special chum, and during his absence he had looked after his quarters, and his stud, but now, to his intense disgust, his friend's polo ponies, his tandem cart and harness, and racing saddles, were all advertised in the *Pioneer!* Only one animal was reserved, and Captain La Touche noted with considerable trepidation, that “Barkis,” though not a polo pony, had the reputation of being a capital ladies' hack. Cosmo La Touche was a shrewd man, and could put two and two together better than most people; his friend had his pay, and no debts, and a small private income; he could easily manage to keep a couple of

ponies and pay his mess bill. Why was he reading so hard with the regimental monshee ? Reading in the muggy, rainy weather, grinding for the Higher Standard, late and early, whilst he himself dozed peacefully under the punka with a French novel within reach ; and why was George Holroyd, who was always supposed to be wrapped up in the regiment, and nothing but the regiment, and who set his face against detachment duty, the dépôt or hill classes, now so desperately eager to get an appointment *anywhere*, so long as it brought him in rupees.

Of course there was a lady in the case, and he boldly taxed him with his guilty secret.

To his anger and astonishment, George admitted that such was positively the fact, admitted it triumphantly.

“And are you engaged?” he demanded sternly.

“No.”

“Oh, come then, it’s not so bad after all!”

“I only wish it was so bad, as you call it.”

“Then why are you not? Won’t she have you?” enquired the other with a jeer in his eyes.

“Because I have only fifty pounds a year and my pay, as long as my mother lives, and, out in this climate, poverty and screwing is the very devil. If I can pass and get some staff appointment we shall manage all right.”

“Is she pretty? But I need not ask *you*; of course she is an angel,” said Captain La Touche ferociously.

“She is very pretty. She is more than pretty, she is charming.”

“And supposing some other fellow steps in, and snaps her up whilst you are stewing over your Hindustani. How will you like *that*? ”

George’s face was a study in complacency. “I am not afraid,” he said quietly.

“You ought to have spoken, and offered yourself at any rate.”

“Of course ! ” rather bitterly, “with nothing to settle on her but a sword, and a tailor’s bill.”

“Well, I hope you will come out of it all right. Have you got her photograph ? ”

“Yes,” examining it critically, “well, it’s a nice face, but one cannot judge ; she may be marked with small-pox or have weak eyes, or a bad figure.”

“She has grey eyes, and is as tall and straight as a young fir tree,” rejoined George indignantly.

“A daughter of the gods, divinely tall, eh? And what is her name?”

“Elizabeth, but they call her Betty. Elizabeth Redmond.”

“Any relation to the Collector here?”

“I don’t know, very probably.”

“And what are your plans, if I may presume to enquire?”

“To pass if I can, and get something that will add to my pay, and then to write home and ask her to come out and marry me. *She* understands me!”

“I am glad to hear it, for it’s more than I do,” rejoined his comrade angrily.

“You must excuse me for not receiving your news with the enthusiasm it deserves, but you know, George, you always swore that you would not marry before you were a major, if then.”

“Very likely, but with all these new warrants I began to think I might *never*

be a major ; you won't say anything about it."

"Trust me," he responded with a gesture of impatience ; "besides, you are not engaged, and the worst may not come to the worst : there is many a slip between the cup and the lip. If you were in any other scrape I would lend you money, and for as long as you liked and insist on your taking it, but I'll never lift a finger to help you to a wife."

Days and weeks went by slowly enough, but Betty's photograph now stood boldly on George's writing-table, and spurred him to many a tough task. True, it was chaperoned by portraits of Mrs. Malone and Cuckoo, and by casual eyes she was supposed to be merely another sister, and Captain La Touche kept his secret. Parades and regimental

work occupied George's mornings, and many an evening he never went out till dark, but worked hard with his monshee, who proclaimed him to be a “wonderfully clever gentleman,” and secretly felt secure of his own premium as together they plodded through the *Prem Sagar* and *Bagh-o-Bahar*. George was obliged to forego boating, cricket and paperchasing, he took his name off the polo club, and abjured cigarettes and expensive boots, and only that in his prosperous days he had always been so open-handed, there would have been an outcry at his economy. But his friends believed he had some excellent reason for his self-denial, though no one but Captain La Touche knew how good that reason was. Captain La Touche was a man of five-and-thirty, with a considerable private fortune, and a handsome, pleasant face.

His figure was his despair, he would grow stout, aye and keep stout ; despite of anti-fat, exercise, and semi-starvation, he still conspicuously filled the eye !

Now he had accepted the situation, ate and drank whatever his rather fastidious palate dictated, kept a weight-carrying charger, and one broad-backed, confidential cob, and fell into the rank of a looker-on, at pig-sticking and polo, and spoke of himself as “a superannuated butterfly !” He was not what is called “a red-hot soldier,” and never aspired to command the Royal Musketeers. He looked upon parades and orderly rooms as vexatious interludes in an otherwise agreeably spent existence, but he was very much attached to the regiment, as an excellent travelling club, and was the firm, personal friend of almost every one of his brother officers ; and George

Holroyd was Jonathan to this goodly, popular, and somewhat cynical, David.

He was president of the mess, organised entertainments that were invariably a success, arranged the daily menus, overawed all the waiters, and knew how to put a crusty commanding officer through a course of the most soothing dinner treatment. In fact, he was king of the mess, by universal acclamation, and to hear that he was to lose his right hand, his prime favourite, by marriage, was a blow as painful as it was unexpected. Captain La Touche had some French blood in his veins, and spoke the language like a native. His manners to ladies were unapproachable for chivalrous politeness, and yet, like Miss Dopping, he preferred to associate with the sterner sex; nevertheless he was a keen observer and took an almost

effeminate interest in their dress. As to his own outward appearance, it was the result of patient study, and the mirror at which many another man fashioned himself. For a first-rate opinion on a coat, a dinner, a point of etiquette or a claret vintage, you could not go to a better person than Captain Cosmo La Touche ; extremes meet ; he and his chosen friend were almost diametrically opposite in mind, body and estate. One was a Sybarite, the other a sportsman ; one was a philosopher, the other a man of action. One could eat anything that was set before him, the other would sooner perish !

I am afraid we cannot conceal from ourselves that Captain La Touche is a *bon vivant*, and is very proud of his delicate palate. Indeed, he has publicly given out that the woman who aspires to

be Mrs. La Touche—be she never so beautiful—must have taken honours at the school of cookery ! He gave a good many of his thoughts to George’s affairs, as he lay in a Bombay chair and smoked cigarette after cigarette, meditating sadly on his friend’s future.

This girl, this Miss Redmond, had a pretty, well-bred face, and looked as if she had no nonsense about her ; she rode well (if George was to be believed) and played tennis, and was a fair musician, and would possibly be an acquisition to the station ; but what a loss George would be to the mess ! He was a capital rider, could tell a good story, and sing a good song, and was quite the most brilliant polo player in the province.

Now all that would be at an end ! He would only care for driving his wife about in a little pony-cart, and subse-

quently dining *tête-à-tête* on a leg of mutton, and custard pudding — *ugh!* George would sink into domestic limbo “*avec la fatalité d'une pierre qui tombe.*”

Mangobad was a typical up country station, sequestered and self-contained. Besides the Royal Musketeers, there was a native infantry regiment, a chaplain, a judge, a collector, several doctors, several engineers, a few indigo planters in from the district, and now and then a great man encamped in the mango tope, with his imposing transport of camels, elephants, and carriage horses.

The cantonment was just a comfortable size for a sociable community — and luckily the community *was* sociable ; it numbered about fifty men and fifteen ladies, but the latter fluctuated. Sometimes they numbered as many as thirty, sometimes but three.

The station was situated in the midst of a great flat grain country, diversified by fine groves or topes of forest trees, and scattered over with red-roofed villages of immemorial antiquity. Riding along the well-kept pucka roads, with ripe, yellow corn waving at either side, the cool November air and the noble timber would deceive one into believing that they were in the south of Europe, until a Commissariat elephant lumbering along, or a camel carriage and pair, or a four-in-hand of hideous water buffaloes, dragging a primitive wain laden with sugar-cane, dispelled the idea. Besides the level roads bordered with Neem, Shesum, Sirus, and Teak trees, there were smooth, green parade grounds and comfortable bungalows, standing in the midst of luxuriant gardens, where roses, passion-flowers, oranges and strawberries,

mangoes and mignonette grew in sociable abundance.

There was a picturesque church and an excellent station club, where all the community assembled to read the papers, play tennis, drink tea, and hear the news ; but invariably, by the middle of April, the tennis courts were deserted, the chairs round the tea-table were vacant, and the gallop of ponies was no longer heard cutting up the adjacent polo ground. All those who could command money and leave, had promptly fled away to various hill stations.

George Holroyd was not among the exodus, he remained to do duty—the little that is possible with the thermometer at 104—and to sit behind a “*Khus-khus*” tattie, while the hot west wind came booming through the mango trees—and fought with the drowsy, stifling

hours, and the weary pages of the *Bagh-o-Bahar*. Captain La Touche had gone to Simla, where he was a conspicuous member of the clubs, and an esteemed customer at Peliti’s, and gave *recherché* little dinners at the châlet ; he had done his utmost to carry his friend with him, and had used arguments, bribes, and even threats.

“ You will go mad, my dear fellow, you will certainly go mad, staying down here, and grinding your brains away ; you will feel the effects before another week goes over your head. Come up for a couple of months at least ; come and stay with *me* ; come, my dear boy, and see Simla. Come ! I’ll mount you at polo, come ! ”

“ Not I—thank you ; if I went anywhere I would go into Cashmere. I have no taste for sticking myself over

with patent leather and peacock's feathers, and riding beside a woman's rickshaw."

"It would depend upon *who* was in the rickshaw, I suppose. Eh? Well, if you don't mind yourself, it's my opinion that one of these days we shall be riding after your coffin! Promise me before I go, that if you feel at all seedy you will send me a wire, and follow it at once."

As he was very pertinacious, George gave him the required promise, solely for the sake of peace.

Early in June he went up for his examination, and, whilst he awaited the result in miserable suspense, he received a letter from his uncle Godfrey, who, through the family lawyer, had recently discovered the state of his money affairs. After upbraiding him angrily for keeping the matter from him, and for allowing himself to be stripped to his last shilling

in order to support Major Malone’s family, he went on to say that he would make him an allowance of five hundred a year, in order that he might live like a gentleman, and as became his heir, and if he would only come home, and settle down, and marry some nice girl, he would do a great deal more for him.

“And if I settle down, and marry a nice girl out here, I wonder what he will say to that?” said his nephew to himself, as he tried to realise his unexpected good fortune. He did not spend much time in reflection, but galloped over to the Colonel’s bungalow, and asked that amazed officer “if there was any chance of his getting three months’ leave to England, and to start at once.”

“Not the smallest,” returned the Colonel firmly, adding a complaint that he made at least ten times a day—“I have only

four subalterns. You know I am terribly short of officers—Indeed, Holroyd, I wonder that a man of your sense could be such a fool as to propose such a thing ! ”

The same mail that brought Mr. Godfrey Holroyd’s letter brought the news that Colonel and Mrs. Calvert were coming out in September. Colonel Calvert was the District Inspector of Police for Mangobad. What a chance for Betty ! She might travel with *them*. He lost no time in writing, and despatching three letters by the out-going mail, one to the Calverts, and two to Noone, and anxiously awaited Betty’s telegram.

In due time the answer arrived, and by a strange coincidence, the same day’s post brought the agreeable intimation that he had passed the Higher Standard in Hindustani. Surely a lucky omen, if

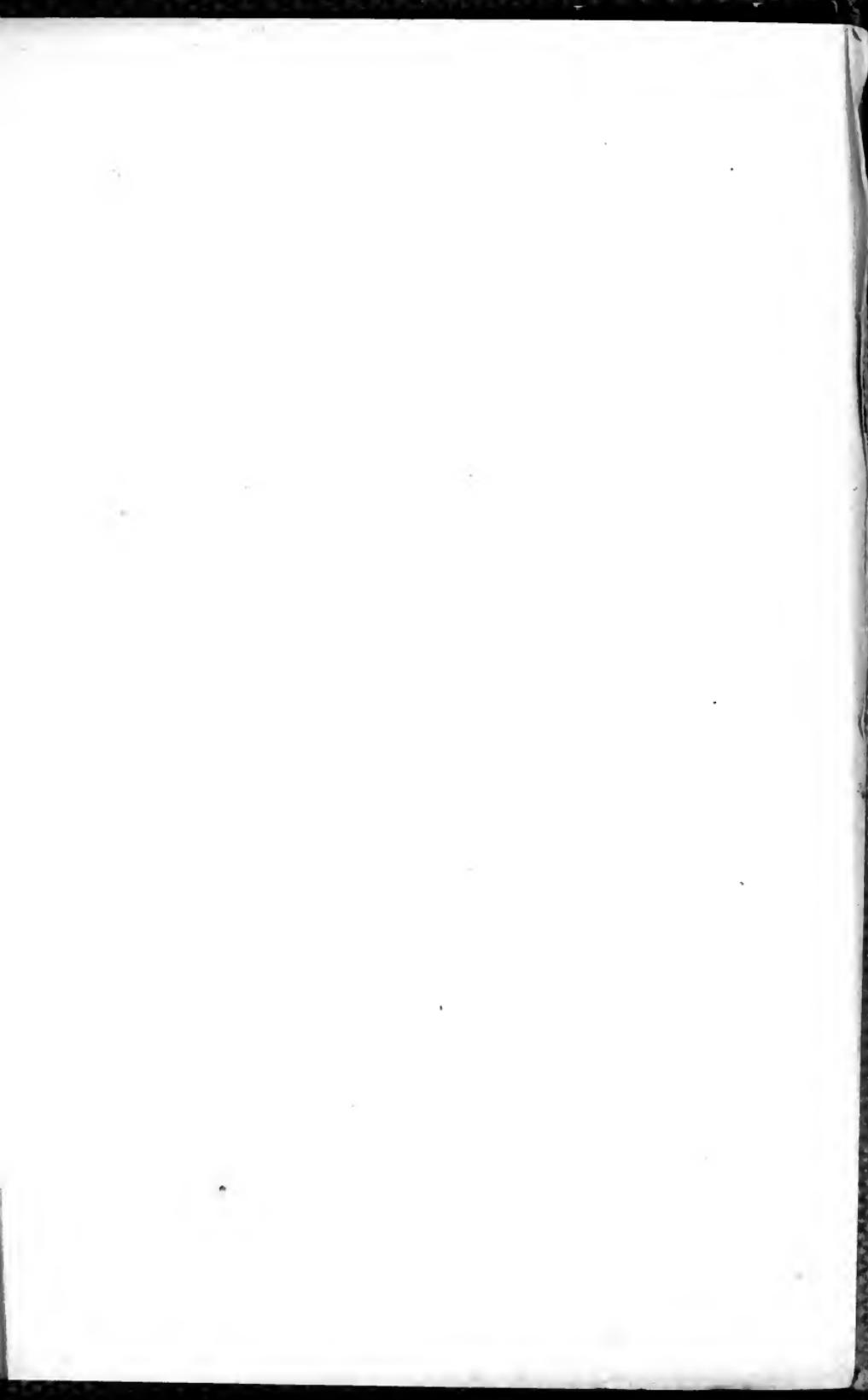
omens stand for aught. He gave a dinner at the mess to celebrate the event with his brother officers.

(Also *another* event of which they were as yet in ignorance.)

Fortune, who had turned her back on him for so long, was now apparently all smiles, and seemed to be thrusting her favours on him with both hands.

END OF VOL. II.

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